

# End of an Era:

## Workplace Culture Looks Different - And Better



## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unparalleled challenges in virtually all facets of our personal and working lives. The impacts on people's physical, emotional and mental health; financial well-being and security; future goals and aspirations; family and community relationships; are pervasive and enduring. So, too are the profound impacts and implications for business organizations of all sizes and types; and, the world of work as we've known and experienced it traditionally.

At personal levels, too many continue to grieve unimaginable losses, struggle to make ends meet, and adapt to a long list of new realities. Others more fortunate, nonetheless, continue to confront a wide array of day-to-day and longer-term challenges. As a leading organizational research-based consultancy, Great Place to Work® has focused this special research series on the following:

**Part 1: Key Impacts of the Pandemic.** Specifically, how has the crisis affected employee engagement, workplace culture and trust in Canada and how have these impacts varied by industry?

**Part 2: Bold Acts of Leadership.** What have organizations and their leaders been doing to mitigate the multitude of impacts and re-position for success going forward?

**Part 3: Long Term Changes “for Good”.** Is there a “silver lining” to the pandemic that has led to positive trends that may be enduring and change our workplaces for good?

Interwoven throughout our research and action learnings are key themes about organizational leadership, communication, support systems, people management and how these have affected and helped mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on employee engagement and performance.

## Methodology

The methodologies used by Great Place to Work® varied to best meet the objectives for each part of this 3-part series. More specifically:

**Part 1: Key Impacts of the Pandemic.** Over 50,000 employees were surveyed from 227 organizations across a broad spectrum of industries using GPTW's Trust Index® survey. Employees participated from across all job levels, front line to C-Suite, and functional areas. The surveys were conducted between April 1 and December 31, 2020 and results were compared against the same organizations' 2019 survey results, thus providing a year-over-year view on the impacts of the pandemic.

**Part 2: Bold Acts of Leadership.** Between April 1 and December 31, 2020 GPTW's Culture Brief®, a structured open-ended questionnaire, was employed to ask designated contacts from the 200 Best Workplaces in Canada to describe:

**“The bold acts of leadership your organization has taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis to create a great workplace For ALL your people, in your community or in the world.”**

These 200 Best Workplaces are characterized by their exceptionally high levels of organizational trust.

**Part 3: Long Term Changes “for Good”.** In March 2021 a brief follow-up survey was conducted with primary designated contacts at the 200 Best Workplaces in Canada. This surveyed focused on the extent to which these Best Workplaces are committed to investing in positive changes or initiatives triggered by the pandemic that may become more permanent or enduring long-term.

# Part 1: Key Impacts on Workplace Trust and Engagement

A central barometer of workplace health draws on the Great Place to Work® overall Trust Index®.

Based on four decades of organizational research and experience, the 63 standard questions in this employee survey measure critical dimensions of workplace trust including Leadership Credibility; Respect for Employees; Organizational, Personal and Team Pride; Camaraderie; and, Fairness of Treatment.

The foundation of this model is built on workplace TRUST. Shaped by the quality of relationships between employees and management, their colleagues, and work, trust shapes employee motivation and the work experience.

How have overall levels of trust in the workplace been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic? To help answer this, we surveyed over 50,000 employees representing 227 organizations across a broad spectrum of industries using the Great Place to Work® Trust Index (TI) survey. Employees participated from across all job levels, front line to C-Suite, and functional areas. The surveys were conducted between April 1 and December 31, 2020 and results were compared against the same organizations' 2019 survey results.

Contrary to initial expectations, the majority of organizations surveyed (59%) have higher overall TI results during the pandemic than they did last year, on average by +4.1 percentage points. A smaller, but still substantial 41% of organizations, declined by -4.2% on average from last year. Combining all 227 organizations, workplace trust improved year-over-year by an average of +0.71 percentage points.

Specifically, participation levels increased in 58% of organizations by an average of +7.4%. Overall, survey response rates improved by an average of +1.34%. Survey response rate is a partial and "indirect" indicator of employee engagement, i.e., the higher the participation, the higher the employee engagement and vice versa.

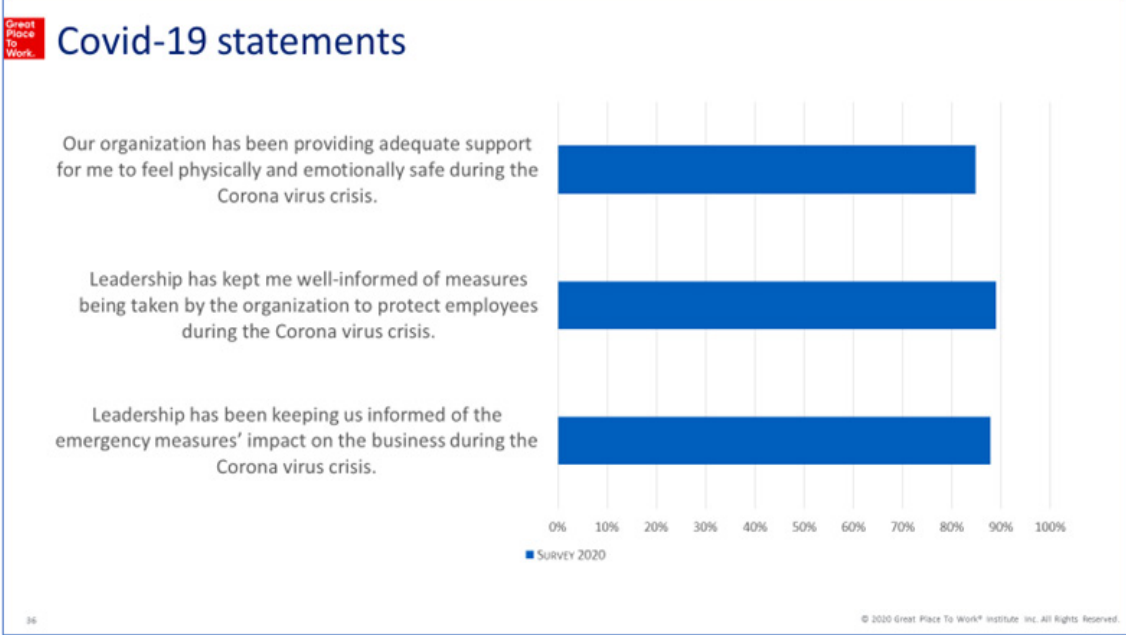


## Why Workplace Trust and Engagement Have Increased During the Pandemic

Organizations are dynamic enterprises that are continuously anticipating and managing change in response to external and internal imperatives. And, while many participating organizations introduced positive changes in response to their 2019 survey results, the net positive gains realized during a year of unprecedented adversity speak to much more than “incremental” ongoing change management. They speak to bold acts of leadership under the most challenging of circumstances.

As discussed in this paper, the upward gains reflect increased organizational empathy, flexibility, communication, and support demonstrated and delivered by leadership, at all levels.

Highlighted below are results from GPTW’s Trust Index employee survey conducted between April and December 2020 with 53625 employees from 291 organizations about how they’ve helped mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.



To help put these results into perspective, we compared them against the average results for all other statements in the survey. The average score is only 86% positive, or 7 percentage points lower than the 93% average for these 3 COVID-specific questions. Clearly, these organizations have gone above and beyond in their responsiveness to employee needs during the COVID-19 crisis. They have not only met but exceeded employee expectations and helped reinforce and enhance levels of workplace trust and engagement.

### Differential Impacts by Industry

As illustrated in the following and subsequent charts, the nature and magnitude of pandemic impacts on workplace trust and engagement.

Industry	Year-over-Year Changes (Avg. %)	
	Trust Index Score	Response Rate
Construction & Real Estate	+2.08%	+9.36%
Financial Services	+1.95%	+0.40%
Manufacturing/Production	+1.78%	+3.15%
Biotech/Pharmaceutical	+1.22%	+1.25%
Public Sector: Government, Not-for-Profit, Health Care	+0.88%	<b>-0.18%</b>
Information Technology	+0.11%	+1.87%
Professional Services	<b>-0.04%</b>	+1.92%
Retail & Hospitality	<b>-0.07%</b>	+0.42%
Other	+0.12%	+2.07%

The greatest Y-O-Y gains in both overall Trust Index scores and survey response rates have been in the Construction & Real Estate sector. Notwithstanding the pandemic's significant adverse impacts on construction projects, financing and materials supply; and, profound implications for commercial and residential Real Estate, this combined sector appears to be most resilient and responsive in managing the impacts for their workforce and actually strengthening trust and engagement levels. Not surprising, the most adverse impacts on overall workplace trust have been among those sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, including Retail & Hospitality and Professional Services.

## Specific Aspects of Trust Most Affected by the Pandemic

The core dimensions of GPTW's Trust Model have shown remarkable stability year-over-year. This reflects a combination of great organizational resilience and adaptability in the face of profound operating environment and personal challenges.

Trust Index Metric	% Positive		
	2019	2020	Difference
<b>Core Trust Dimensions:</b>			
• Credibility	84.3%	85.4%	+1.1%
• Respect	84.0%	84.7%	+0.8%
• Fairness	83.6%	84.2%	+0.6%
• Pride	84.9%	85.9%	+1.0%
• Camaraderie	88.2%	88.8%	+0.5%
<b>Performance Outcomes</b>	84.2%	85.7%	+1.5%
<b>Managerial Index</b>	<b>87.8%</b>	<b>88.8%</b>	<b>+1.0%</b>
<b>Overall Trust Index</b>	<b>84.8%</b>	<b>85.7%</b>	<b>+0.9%</b>

The five core dimensions of workplace trust above have actually improved during the pandemic by an average of +0.8 percentage points. These year-over-year gains are contributing to perceptions of enhanced organizational and individual performance, e.g., customer service, innovation, and workforce adaptability. Additional gains on the Managerial Index indicate that success in mitigating pandemic impacts has engendered a coming together of executives, managers, and employees at all levels and in all areas of their organizations.

The outstanding responsiveness and support demonstrated by leadership have not only been welcomed by employees but also reciprocated in terms of greater engagement and performance. It's been a "two-way" street. The stability of these positive year-over-year survey results further reflects the enduring nature of workforce culture.

The following chart drills down into the dimensions of trust to identify those specific survey statements that have improved most during the pandemic vs. last year.

Greatest Improvements Over Last Year (% Positive)				
Trust Index Questions	Dimension	2019	2020	Difference
People here quickly adapt to changes needed for our organization's success.	Performance	82.4%	85.8%	+3.5%
Management keeps me informed about important issues and changes.	Credibility	80.5%	83.0%	+2.5%
We're all in this together.	Camaraderie	84.4%	86.5%	+2.1%
Our facilities contribute to a good working environment.	Respect	87.6%	89.7%	+2.1%
I believe management would lay people off only as a last resort.	Respect	83.8%	85.9%	+2.0%

These results reiterate leadership’s emphasis on keeping employees well informed during the pandemic and reassuring them that layoffs will be used only as a last resort. Once again, people have a heightened sense of all stakeholders being in this together and being adaptive to the changes required for success.

As indicated in the following chart, the pandemic also appears to have contributed to certain year-over-year declines, most notably, in internal celebrations of special events, physical safety of the workplace, and fairness of treatment based on personal backgrounds. These slips are relatively modest further reflecting leadership effectiveness in mitigating adverse impacts of the crisis.

At the same time, these and other declines point to noteworthy needs and opportunities for further positive change during and emerging from the pandemic.




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Greatest Declines Over Last Year (% Positive)				
Trust Index Questions	Dimension	2019	2020	Difference
People celebrate special events around here.	Camaraderie	88.6%	87.0%	-1.6%
People here are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.	Fairness	95.3%	94.7%	-0.7%
This is a physically safe place to work.	Respect	96.2%	95.6%	-0.6%
I am able to take time off from work when I think it's necessary.	Respect	91.0%	90.5%	-0.5%
People here are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation.	Fairness	96.8%	96.4%	-0.5%
People here are treated fairly regardless of their gender.	Fairness	93.7%	93.6%	-0.1%


## How Have Specific Impacts of the Pandemic Varied by Industry?




As with the overall Trust Index® scores, our research highlights noteworthy industry-specific impacts in various aspects of workplace trust during the pandemic. These differential impacts are displayed graphically in the appendix.



The Information Technology sector was found to be most consistent in workplace improvements with the total pattern of impacts of the pandemic. More specifically, 4 of the top 5 most improved TI elements in this industry were also evident in the total sample. Financial Services is next most consistent; whereas, Construction/Real Estate is the least consistent sector having only 1 of its top 5 improvements, i.e., “We’re all in this together”, among the top 5 overall.



The Public Sector, Biotech/Pharma, and Retail/Hospitality sectors each have only two statements consistent with the total sample pattern. This diversity of results reflects the differential nature of impacts of the pandemic on workplaces as a function of their industry.



Turning next to greatest declines related to the pandemic by industry, greatest consistency with the total results is evident in Financial Services and Biotech/Pharma, followed closely by Information Technology. These 3 industries are relatively consistent on 5 of the top 6 declines in the total sample. The least consistent pattern of adverse pandemic impacts is within Retail/Hospitality where only one statement is among the top 6 total sample declines. Considering both the gains and declines together, the varying patterns imply clear differential impacts of the pandemic by industry. Organizations that not only survive but flourish during and emerging from the pandemic will be those that align their business strategies, management practices and values with the distinctive impacts and imperatives for their industries.

# Part 2: Bold Acts of Leadership

Part 2 of this series highlights these qualitative bold acts of leadership at Best Workplaces. Our synthesis reveals that leaders were able to capitalize on the foundation of workplace trust they'd built over the years to take bold actions, make tough decisions, and act swiftly and decisively in ways that inspired the confidence of their employees and indeed actually increased existing levels of trust.

These “bold acts of leadership”, demonstrated to varying degrees in virtually all 200 of the Best Workplaces in Canada, have helped them to not only survive but thrive during the pandemic. Several recurrent themes emerged from our analysis:

1. Making Tough Decisions
2. Pump Up the Volume
3. And the Survey Says...
4. All Hands On-Deck
5. The Greater Good
6. Perfectly Imperfect
7. The Power of Appreciation
8. The Balancing Act
9. The Virtual Water Cooler


Each of these themes is described briefly in this paper and illustrated with specific examples of bold acts of leadership from the Best Workplaces.

## Making Tough Decisions

Early on during the pandemic business leaders across Canada were forced to make difficult decisions about how best to navigate the crisis before its full impact was at all clear.


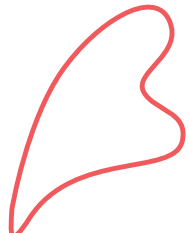
About one quarter of Best Workplaces conveyed a clear commitment to their employees that there would be no layoffs due to the pandemic.






Against the backdrop of global uncertainties, **Mastercard Canada's** CEO planted an early stake, committing to protect everyone's jobs from COVID-19 impacts so that people could focus on what matters most – their health, family health and adjusting to the rapidly evolving “new normal”.


**Hyundai Canada's** leadership team knew that when markets recovered, they'd need their full team and culture intact; so, they decided and communicated early on that no one would be let go.





To avoid or minimize layoffs, some of the Best Workplaces instituted pay cuts, with senior leaders bearing the brunt.




A leader in the food industry, **ChefHero** was hard hit financially by the crisis, but stayed strong together, working through each new emerging issue with compassion and empathy. The leadership team was able to reduce layoffs by asking everyone to share the pain by taking a modest salary cut (10%) while the leadership team and CEO took much larger cuts (25% and 40%, respectively).



Of those Best Workplaces needing to layoff or furlough staff, many offered job transition support, extended benefits coverage and/or other forms of assistance.



With many client projects delayed or cancelled worldwide due to the pandemic, **CGI Canada** implemented temporary layoffs (TLO) of members in Canada. Those affected still retained access to CGI benefits, Share Purchase Plan and various tools and resources. Nonetheless, significantly lower monthly income from CERB led CGI Canada to introduce a financial Top-Up plan for TLOs funded by salary reductions from their President, Business Unit leaders and VPs.




Perhaps the most significant and fundamental challenge for leaders during the pandemic has been balancing the needs of the business with the health and safety of employees. For all Best Workplaces, the choice was clear – employee safety always comes first.

Given the potential for serious adverse impacts of COVID-19 on athletes, coaches and support teams, the **Canadian Olympic Committee** took an early position they would not send a team to Tokyo if the Games went ahead as scheduled for the summer of 2020. This difficult but essential decision to protect Team Canada was well received by COC staff, the sports community and Canadians in general. Soon after this decision, the IOC and Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee announced the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games until the summer of 2021.


## Pump Up The Volume

Right from the outset, virtually all Best Workplaces reported significantly increased frequency of direct communication from leadership. Many leaders doubled or tripled their communication touchpoints.


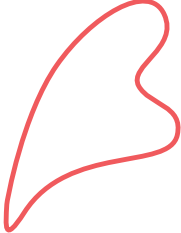
When **Optimus SBR** transitioned to work-from-home, enhanced communication was a top priority. Leadership team communications three times a week provided trusted information about the state of the business, Optimus culture, COVID-19 progression, government guidance and articles of interest.





ATB's senior leadership team committed to being fully accessible and transparent throughout the pandemic. Early on, the CEO crafted daily messages emailed to all team members each evening. Weekly 'Fridays in 15' sessions hosted by the CEO were instituted to answer any and all questions from team members; and, based on popular demand, were subsequently extended to 45 minutes.



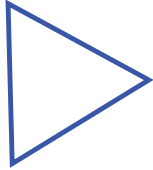
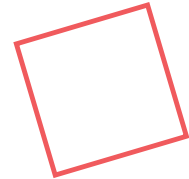

Amplified communication has continued to serve two key goals. First it keeps employees up to date on a highly fluid, rapidly changing situation and its impacts on the business. Second, it brings clarity to what is expected of employees and what they can expect from their employer.




Early on in the pandemic, Explorance leadership announced all employees would be working from home until at least September. This clear expectation offered employees some certainty in a very uncertain world, enabling them to plan their summer knowing they could not only work from home, but from anywhere until at least September.



Team talks at Ryan have evolved from largely audio calls to Zoom webinars with the CEO. Employees enjoy seeing their CEO in his home office setting, including the occasional interruptions from his family! Even more recently, the Q&A portion of the calls have been expanded to include the entire leadership team on the zoom call, ready to answer questions and respond to suggestions. Being able to see and interact with each other by video affords much needed human connection during times of physical distancing.







While enhanced communication continues to be delivered in many traditional ways, e.g., email, newsletters, recorded videos, etc. the most memorable and impactful messages have been delivered real time directly from most senior leaders working from their home offices, without formal scripts. Connecting this way has helped employees to see the “real person” behind the leader.





**Centurion Asset Management** rolled out Microsoft Teams organization-wide so that employees can connect face-to-face, regardless of their physical location while mitigating the loss of visual social cues with traditional phone calls. The leadership team also introduced regular online meetings with staff to facilitate developing more meaningful relationships with team members, including opportunities to meet each other’s families and pets, and learn more about their respective lives at home.




Many organizations have reported that introducing virtual platforms like Teams and Zoom has actually enhanced communication across the organization. In addition to team meetings, people leaders continue to play a huge role in connecting with employees one-on-one, helping them feel better connected and supported.



**General Bank of Canada** provides their people leaders with training and resources for managing remote teams, including tips on how to have remote meetings, manage productivity, communicate effectively online and manage employee engagement.




The pandemic has helped **Online Business Systems** put all team members on a level playing field. Online team meetings have proven to be more inclusive than traditional in-person meetings, with all Onliners receiving the same information at the same time and in the same way. Communications and meetings have also become more purposeful, reinforcing a mindset that ‘we’re all in this together’.




Flybits strives to ensure that even the most sensitive interactions between managers and employees are continuously nurtured. Managers have been empowered to decide how best to support their teams virtually. Creative and team-customized ideas have included: side-by-side virtual working together hours, quiet hours (non-meeting, protected time to get work done), outside team activities and online social events.

## And the Survey Says...




Operating in uncharted territory, Best Workplaces have tuned in more closely to their employees to figure out how best to navigate the pandemic. Many have leveraged Great Place to Work's complimentary Covid-19 pulse survey to assess in real time how they're doing and help provide guidance. Cross-industry results confirm that the great majority of employees at Best Workplaces feel exceptionally well informed and supported by their leaders.



**92%** of employees feel they're receiving the support needed to feel physically and emotionally safe during the crisis


**94%** feel leadership has kept them well-informed of measures being taken to protect employees during the crisis

**93%** feel leadership has been keeping them informed of emergency measures' impact on the business during the crisis


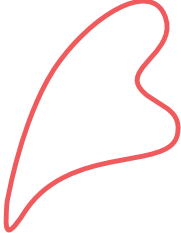


While pulse surveys are a great tool for systematically gauging how employees are feeling and thinking, the real magic happens when organizations respond with empathy and action their feedback to develop genuine "listening" cultures and practices.







One of **Resolver's** key aims has been to translate employee feedback into programs and support tools focused on helping team members navigate and thrive in a remote setting, during the pandemic and beyond. Every three weeks a pulse survey is conducted with all employees and then actioned quickly. Right out of the gate, Resolver introduced asynchronous collaboration tools and launched a learning series based on feedback. Workshops were built in-house and provided insights on topics like Resilience During Times of Change & Uncertainty, Inclusivity & Allyship, Assertiveness, Leveraging Feedback, and Time Management & Prioritization. Resolver's critical feedback loop between employee-voice and action fostered both resilience and organizational results.




Leaders at Best Workplaces have also regularly invited and responded to employee questions with an unprecedented level of transparency and openness.




In the absence of in-person or hallway conversations, the People & Culture team at **360Insights** has widely expanded their listening strategy. Bi-weekly COVID-19 Check-Ins through the first half of the pandemic year, which then evolved into more specific focus areas, and weekly business updates with the leadership team, including the CEO, are held every Wednesday morning across the company, with live Q&A periods for as long as needed to answer each and every question...no topics barred.




## All Hands On-Deck




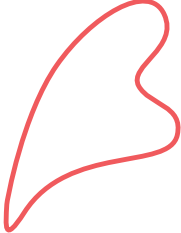
The pandemic has inspired employees from all levels to step up and do whatever needs to be done - from individual contributors volunteering to help whenever and wherever they're needed most, to people leaders serving clients curbside, and CEOs delivering computer monitors to employees' homes.






**Bluecat** has been supporting employees working from home by providing them with monitors and chairs from the office. Office equipment has been delivered personally by the VP, People and COO renting uHauls to make drop offs to employee homes around the GTA.

With the elimination of various jobs and roles, employees are busier than ever. Best Workplaces have quickly reskilled and redeployed staff to meet business demands when and where they're needed most.



**Kicking Horse Coffee** needed to close their onsite consumer facing café to reduce the risks of virus transmission to team members. Jobs were protected by transitioning and training café staff for new roles within the factory.

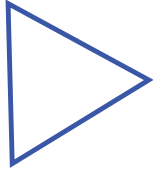
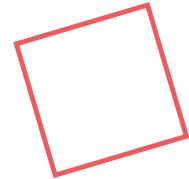



All retail locations at **Clearly** needed to be closed for two months although employees continued to receive full wages. Some team members were deployed to Operations and Customer service during the closure to fulfill customer orders as quickly as possible.

Numerous inspiring tales of employees stepping up to help each other reinforced the prominent theme at Best Workplaces of 'we're all in this together'.

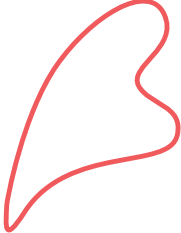


**Ultimate Kronos Group (UKG)** established an Employee Relief Fund for employees and their families severely impacted by COVID-19. Those affected can receive financial support which will continue beyond COVID-19. UKG also partnered with employees in donating to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy Global COVID-19 Response Fund. Millions of dollars have been raised to date for both funds. All told, UKG and its employees have raised over \$2 million for COVID-19 relief.







**Cadence** was building its next flagship product when the pandemic hit. They swiftly assembled a taskforce to monitor developments, implement new ways of working and create new programs and benefits for employees (including flexible work hours, additional time off, home offices and wellness stipends). Managers were also trained on topics such as wellness check-ins and empathetic leadership to support employees. With sensitivity, responsiveness to employees facing external stressors, and effective work distribution, the project was completed on schedule to meet their customer's needs.




## The Greater Good




With so many needs emerging in such a short period of time, e.g., for personal protective equipment, food, support, and technical expertise, Canadian business responded with impressive speed and generosity.




During the pandemic, about a third of the Best Workplaces actively ramped up their community giving, including money, supplies and services.




**RBC** introduced RBC Future Launch at Home, a new, online resource dedicated to youth-focused virtual programming and learning opportunities. With the pandemic dramatically affecting schools, communities and in-person programming, this program is focused on ensuring that youth across Canada have access to resources and tools that will help them navigate through difficult times and exit the pandemic better prepared for success.

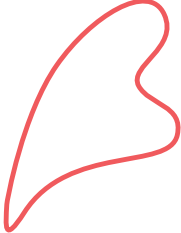





**Bacardi Limited** launched #RaiseYourSpirits, a global initiative to support bars and restaurants debilitated by COVID-19. Witnessing in real time long-time partners and friends losing their livelihoods virtually overnight, the Bacardi family of brands pledged \$4 Million in financial aid and other support to help those on the frontlines of their industry mitigate devastating consequences.






**Richardson Wealth** implemented the Partners in Community Gifting Program pledging to match employee donations of up to \$100,000. Employees across Canada donated over \$150,000, for a combined total of over \$250,000 to causes ranging from food resources to NGOs, health organizations, the community, animal charities, education, arts and culture.



Many Best Workplaces were able to leverage their own products and services in support of their communities.



While impacted dramatically by the pandemic, **Hilton** has been consistent in its commitment to hospitality and how they care for their team members, guests, and communities. Even with furloughs required for most employees, Hilton has sustained its support for local communities. Hilton Toronto has partnered with Workers for Wishes and the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario to have sick children and their families stay at the hotel at no cost while they receive treatment. And, at the height of the pandemic, the Hilton Toronto Airport provided boxed breakfasts to healthcare workers at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto as a thank you for their efforts on the front line.




**TD** responded to the urgent need for help by enhancing some of their customer services, including TD Helps financial relief programs, providing flexible solutions for financial hardships such as mortgage deferrals and loan consolidation into lower interest rates.







In response to Government calls for real-time innovation and solutions to slow the spread of COVID-19, **SAP** joined forces with other leading technology & professional services firms. Organized by SAP, over 700 volunteers from these companies across Canada submitted over 100 ideas and solutions to help address key challenges, e.g., managing the physical and emotional effects of isolation, encouraging adherence to Public Sector COVID-19 safety measures, and supporting those industries most severely impacted by COVID-19. SAP is now in discussions with the federal government on next steps for the five winning ideas.




Wherever possible, Best Workplaces have actively engaged their employees in giving back to the community, with some even inviting customers to join their efforts.



**The Commonwell** offered \$100 to each of their household policy holders. Named Pay It Forward, the program encourages members to use the \$100 directly if they needed it, but to consider donating it to the community or someone else in need if they didn't.



**Softchoice** has supported the Caring and Connecting Pen Pal Initiative. Employees connect with elderly people in their communities who are isolated and unable to have visitors due to lockdowns by composing letters, creating drawings, writing poetry, etc.



## Perfectly Imperfect

The rapid transition to working from home has been one of the biggest workplace eye-openers during the pandemic. Organizations normally requiring 6 months to implement software pre-pandemic were able to do so successfully (if not perfectly) within a week.

About a third of Best Workplaces reported making this transition quickly and efficiently. Virtually all offered strong support for their employees in making the transition. Many allowed employees to bring their company equipment home; and, about a quarter offered stipends for home office set up.

Even before COVID-19 was classified as a global pandemic **Hothead Games** listened to their staff and their specific health concerns about public transportation, disease transmission, etc. and initiated their emergency work-from-home plans. Cab vouchers and moving boxes were prepared in advance, and staff took home anything they needed, including computer hardware, standing desks and other office furniture. Within 24 hours, staff had comfortable home workspaces and were able to collaborate with teammates!

To ensure employees had the necessary equipment and supplies to work safely from home, **Richardson GMP** expanded their wellness account to include office items.

Many Best Workplaces pivoted quickly to create new products and services to fill demands created by the pandemic.

**KOHO Financial** saw firsthand the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on their users. Within days, they implemented new technology for users to receive CERB payments directly to their KOHO accounts and cut down on wait time for government benefits.

**Inertia** quickly shifted their focus to support the design and production of masks and ventilators. They partnered with a trusted vendor to develop and bring to market an innovative reusable mask called REMASK (with \$1 from each sale going to the Canadian Mental Health Association). Inertia also worked with a client to invest in and design a prototype portable and affordable emergency ventilator called LifeAir.

**Achievers'** mission is to Change the Way the World Works. This also means stepping up when the world changes. As part of their employee success platform, Achievers launched a Critical Event Resilience Survey and Toolkit, with new questions and conversation starters about the pandemic.

**Medtronic** shared its IP that allowed more collaborators to help reduce the shortage of ventilators in Canada.

Others used relative 'quiet time' afforded by the pandemic to learn new skill sets and focus on employee development.

With their business profoundly affected by the pandemic, **Wynford-Event Simple** has invested in creating a safe place for employees to learn through greater cross functional training, especially in areas where they don't typically have much exposure. For example, Administrative assistants learn about proposal development while travel air managers learn about budget creation. This cross collaborative approach has further connected the team, helped them learn more about 'their world' while helping everyone to feel like they can contribute in meaningful ways - even if their pre covid roles have been put on pause due to severe travel restrictions.

## The Power of Appreciation

Many organizations amped up their recognition programs to show employees, especially those on the front lines, how much they are valued.


**Baxter's** #1 priority during the pandemic has been to provide a safe work environment for their front-line employees who manufacture, compound and deliver life sustaining therapies to hospitals and home patients. To recognize and incent these employees for leaving their homes each day, added financial incentives, enhanced vacation allotments, and company payments for employee portions of benefits premiums have been provided to essential front-line employees.

**Clipwire Games** continues to show appreciation for staff during the pandemic, although they needed to get creative in their approaches. Employees were surprised and delighted to receive a new engraved set of Apple ear pods in recognition of the great commitment and teamwork they've demonstrated since beginning to work from home. Achievement-of-the-month dinners have been put on hold until the pandemic is over, but the cash bonuses are still awarded to nominated employees each month and announced in the company newsletter.

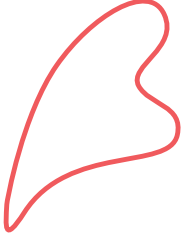
**Admiral Insurance** partnered with Vandal Doughnuts to create and socially-distance deliver boxes of doughnuts to every employee. Admiral embraces familial dynamic, and the doughnut delivery was a reminder of how family underpins their culture, whether they are five desks away or five communities apart.

Prior to the pandemic **7shifts** had lunch catered for staff in all offices each Friday. Now, they give that budget directly to employees so they can purchase lunch at home and support local restaurants who are clients that have been severely impacted by COVID.






The **DHL** team curated gift bags containing thank you cards, toys and other treats for over 1200 DHL kids! Canadian couriers took off like spring-time Santas in red and yellow vans to bring joy to DHL kids. Also rewarding for the couriers, each received gifts for their own children from their supervisors.




**FCT's** commitment to recognizing one another for doing great things has not been hampered. Keeping Us Connected, a new recognition campaign, offers employees additional reward points to recognize one another for their courageous and innovative efforts to work and act differently during the pandemic.



## The Balancing Act




With millions of Canadians working from home and millions of children home from school, work life balance has become a bit blurry at best. Best Workplaces have recognized the importance of supporting balance to protect employee health & wellness.



**Avanti Software** was deliberate in their recommendations and guidelines for team members with children, as this adds complexity to work from home. Team members have been encouraged to utilize flexible work hours to adjust their schedules to a new norm. Status visibility on TEAMS is used to show availability and respect each other's down time.



**Axonify** has encouraged an internal meeting-free zone on Wednesday afternoons to help employees recover from meeting fatigue.



in addition to encouraging flexibility and balance, many Best Workplaces have provided additional time off to help employees take care of family responsibilities or just rest and recharge.

**Jobber** gave employees four ‘Wellness Fridays’ during the summer, four extra vacation days that the entire company took at the same time on alternate Fridays.

In addition to vacation days and personal time off, **Novartis** offers employees 12 days paid caregiving leave should they be unable to work from home or perform their responsibilities as a caregiver for family or friends.

Recognizing growing concerns for mental health for millions of Canadians, most Best Workplaces have stepped up their investments for enhanced benefits and supports for promoting employee wellness.

**Wavemaker** created resource groups to explore areas affecting employee mental wellness. The first resource group was parents. Parents were engaged from across Wavemaker’s network to participate in workshops aimed at uncovering how best to manage the additional stressors and time challenges created by current realities. Managers also conduct regular 1:1 check-ins to determine how they can best support employees. Dedicated websites are publicized with various types of resources that can be utilized by all staff.

**Thomson Reuters** has reinforced its commitment to a mentally healthy workplace by introducing a new permanent annual company holiday. Held in October on or around national Mental Health Day it is part of a broader effort to embed wellbeing into the company’s core workplace culture.

**Salesforce** employees have been encouraged to utilize their unique Global Back-Up Child Care Program. All full- and part-time employees are reimbursed up to \$500 per month for care of dependents up to age 18. During the pandemic, allowable expenses have been expanded to include online and in-person tutoring, educating, and supervision of schoolwork.

## The Virtual Water Cooler

While most of us long for the day when we can interact in person with our colleagues again, Best Workplaces have introduced many ways to maintain the social fabric of their culture, showing that connection is possible, even at a distance. Regular social events, like summer picnics, holiday parties and happy hours, have evolved due to social distancing requirements.

**Appcentrica** introduced a monthly socially distanced outdoor event for staff (compliant with outdoor gathering restrictions) including bringing in a food truck to provide catering. These outdoor events have been highly successful, providing a safe and comfortable way for staff to see each other again in person.

The **Astellas** social committee has hosted several virtual events and contests, including a safe and fun socially distanced employee drive-in event offering head office employees and their families a chance to interact with each other for the first time in months.


**Wave** has engaged a Toronto-based customer to craft a unique experience for their entire team: a custom meal plan with a variety of delicious options from which each Waver can choose. Delivered to their homes these healthy and fresh homemade meals provide a night off from cooking for Wavers and their families. Not only has Wave provided support to their internal team but continues to live their values by fueling the small business community locally.

**Hyundai** hosted, a cross-country pizza party for all 230 employees.


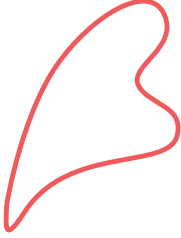
Most organizations discovered numerous creative ways to help employees stay connected online.




In addition to maintaining connections among employees, **Avanti** maintained connections with customers by offering virtual client lunches. Invited clients were sent a SkipTheDishes gift card for takeout from local restaurants. They then ‘eat with’ Avanti team members and other clients. Clients were grouped into similar industries or sizes to help foster connections.





**Isaac Operations** created a Virtual Olympics to help keep employees engaged during the pandemic. Company teams were set up to compete in a variety of challenges such as how many T-shirts can one person put on, who can run the fastest kilometer, who can bake the biggest cookie and eat it, who can recite the most digits of pi and many more.




**Jam3 Inc.** introduced curated activities for employees including jam sessions, yoga, and meditation. Employees were invited to virtually showcase their homes with team members to learn more about one another and participate in Variety O’clock sessions to showcase special talents like cooking, raising pets, gardening etc.



**Haventree Bank’s** culture has traditionally thrived on interactions among employees in the hallways, kitchens, meeting spaces and during social events. To help replace this, the HR team has created in a virtual environment called the Water Cooler to help employees stay connected and socially engaged.



**Kira Systems** set up designated Slack channels to keep employees connected on various topics. Employees contribute everything from online workouts to easy baking ideas, to activities for kids, and online museum tours. One of the most popular channels involves photo challenges such as ‘Guess the Kiran’ (with employees submitting baby photos) and ‘Guess That View’ (where employees submit their workspace) and people guess to whom they belong.



Employees at **Equitable Bank** share pictures of pets, workout routines, weekend plans, etc. providing some moments of lightness during difficult times. Many employees feel closer together as they learn more about each others' lives outside of work.

### Enduring Impacts

For many of the Best Workplaces, these Bold Acts of Leadership have built onto and advanced core values in positive ways to not only help them survive but thrive during the pandemic. In Part 3 of this research series, we turn to the future and look at how the events of the past year have been transformative in shaping the future of work in Canada “for good”.

# Part 3: Changes for Good

Though there is no doubt the pandemic has profoundly challenged organizations and employees physically, mentally, emotionally and financially, there is a ‘silver lining’ that has allowed us to see our humanity in the workplace through a different lens.

One year after our world and workplaces were turned upside down, Great Place to Work reached out to the Best Workplaces in Canada again to learn which changes inspired by the pandemic are most likely to have shaped the way they operate more permanently going forward.

Most reported that not only will their workplaces look very different but will also have changed for the better post-pandemic. Part 3 of this series focuses on five major workplace themes seen to most likely have changed the workplace “for good”:

1. Whole Person Wellness
2. Corporate Citizenship
3. Agility and Innovation
4. Advancing the Inclusion Movement
5. New Rules of Work


## Whole Person Wellness

“If there’s one thing 2020 has taught us, it’s the value of having the mind-space to deal with the unexpected. It’s important for individuals and it’s important for businesses.


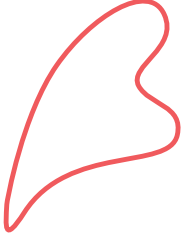
Our newly introduced Mental Health Day Off will become a permanent company holiday, extending beyond 2020 and taking place on or around World Mental Health Day each year. It is the beginning of a broader effort to embed wellbeing into our workplace culture, which will be seen and experienced in the months and years to come.”

Thomson Reuters Canada Ltd.


Above all, the pandemic brought our human vulnerabilities and resilience into sharp focus. Each organization we surveyed exhibited deep and genuine care for the health and safety of their employees and their families.





While physical health and safety have been paramount from the outset, the focus quickly broadened and deepened to mental wellness as well. During the pandemic, virtually all Best Workplaces recognized the need for an enhanced focus on the mental wellness of their employees.




Enhanced benefits took many forms, including stepped up counselling service, online cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation apps, tools for seeking medical advice, online yoga and meditation classes and even financial management. Many organizations told us they doubled or even tripled their investments in workplace mental wellness.



With increased stress levels being reported among all demographic groups across the country, many of the Best Workplaces also introduced extra time-off for employees to rest, recharge and balance work with other responsibilities. This extra time off ranged from occasional office closure days during the summer to formal leave programs to accommodate new caregiving responsibilities.



An enhanced focus on employee wellness is anticipated to become the new norm, with 84% of the Best Workplaces in Canada committed to maintaining their increased investment in workplace mental wellness post post-pandemic and 74% to maintaining increased time-off.



## Corporate Citizenship

“Who do you want to be in this moment? The answer was looking right at us... within our values. We’ve always encouraged people to ‘wake up and kick ass’ and in this moment we needed to do the same for our people, our community and our partners. Above all, this meant first and foremost being the best we could possibly be for our people, prioritizing their health, wellbeing and, by defacto, their financial security. By focusing on our people first, our community impact follows naturally.”

Kicking Horse Coffee



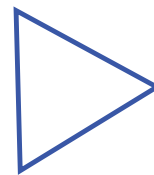
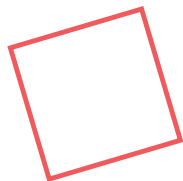
Organizations don’t exist in bubbles. They function as vital and organic parts of the wider community. The pandemic has spurred many organizations to assert their rightful places as community leaders even more actively and prominently than in the past.



Despite severe financial hardships imposed on many of the Best Workplaces in Canada during the pandemic, most have increased their community giving. Many have further developed and implemented creative ways to make an even greater difference. While some increased direct financial donations, others have provided their own products and services pro-bono and some have leveraged their technical expertise to help solve problems on a national and/or global scale.



Making a real difference to broader communities not only feels like the right thing to do; it fosters a heightened sense of employee pride. Indeed, 49% of the Best Workplaces expect to sustain their increased community investments post-pandemic.





## Agility & Innovation

“The pandemic has forced us to be more creative with collaboration and more flexible to individual needs. The result has been a more supportive and agile organization commended internally for its humanity during a time of global crisis.”

### Wavemaker

If the pandemic demonstrated one thing, it's how quickly organizations can shift gears when they really need to. The relatively immediate, seamless and efficient transition to work-from-home and to implementing new safety measures in essential services are two clear cases in point.

Historically the purview of technology, advertising and other fast paced businesses, 'working agile' has become an increasingly essential core competency for all industries.

The pandemic has created the 'perfect storm' for innovation: a heightened sense of urgency; new market demands and opportunities; an openness to try new things; flexibility to work whenever, wherever and however we can be most productive; and an 'explosion' of collaboration tools to help virtual teams work together more effectively. During the pandemic, demands for technology platforms, communications tools, wellness resources, food personal protective equipment and much more have increased exponentially and virtually overnight. Many of the Best Workplaces have responded by developing new products and services to meet these needs. The resulting new revenue streams have increased stability in an unstable world.

59% of the Best Workplaces in Canada introduced new products or services during the pandemic that have created new and enduring lines of business. The speed and success with which they were able to innovate is largely attributed to new ways of working emerging during the pandemic.

## Advancing the Inclusion Movement

“The pandemic has helped us see the extraordinary ways employees have put in consistently high quality work while often faced with challenges we don’t see in the regular workplace: childcare, elder care, isolation, chronic anxiety, physical and technological work constraints, and more. Everyone’s situation is different and there is an understanding from the highest levels of the company that that is ok.”

Equitable Bank

Workplace inclusion has been on corporate agendas for more than a decade, the pandemic has underscored and intensified needs for action and urgency for so many organizations. Clearly, the convergence of Black Lives Matter with the pandemic has further fueled momentum.

The extensive and tragic loss of life, severe and long-term physical illness, and extended social isolation throughout the pandemic have clearly revealed our vulnerabilities and compelled us to connect in new and different ways that highlight both our differences and our interconnectedness. The pandemic has demanded a complex, innovative and rich interplay of collective and individualized strategies and approaches rather than ‘one size fits all’ solutions.

Most of the Best Workplaces in Canada have taken the pandemic as their cue to accelerate the inclusion mandate that they’ve been talking about for so long. 87% have introduced new goals/objectives, programs and/or resources to promote workplace inclusion.

## New Rules of Work

“Axonify’s culture has been reinforced through the pandemic. Our remote experience validates that physical space is not what makes us unique. It’s our people, enabled through our culture, that inspires us to move forward, to pivot, to support each other, to offer the best to our customers, and to uplift each other when we need it most. Our doors are always open...they just look different now. We are proud of our response to COVID-19 and how we’ve lived our commitment to offering the best employee experience.”

Axonify

The need for physical distancing and resultant transition of millions of Canadians to working from home is clearly one of the most significant and lasting impacts of the pandemic.

All Best Workplaces introduced increased flexibility in how, when and where work gets done; and, the vast majority see this direction enduring once the pandemic is over.

Post pandemic, 93% of Best Workplaces are committed to maintaining greater flexibility in how, when and where work gets done.

84% plan to maintain their investment in new technology to facilitate flexible work arrangements.

73% plan to redesign, decentralize and/or eliminate some of their office facilities to facilitate more flexible arrangements.

Most Best Workplaces in Canada have already been articulating plans and evolving their visions for how they will work differently over the long term considering their experience through the pandemic. Presented below are only a few examples of best practices.

The **Hilti** team has proven they don't need to work on premise 100% of their work time to be effective. As a global organization, Hilti is now investigating where and how best to make more work roles remote, allowing for increased flexibility and greater access to numerous global development opportunities.

Spurred by the pandemic, **Softchoice** is now at the forefront of emerging flexible work practices, reimagining how they will work in the future under the 4 Pillars of People, Place, Process and Technology. Employee have been surveyed employees and the feedback is being applied to shape Softchoice's 'future of work'.

**Bluedot** has concluded that their return to the office will not look the same as it did pre-COVID-19. The office will be mainly used as hoteling space for people wanting to work in the office, for certain meetings and for essential in person collaboration. People will be able to choose what works best for them, their lifestyles and working styles.

Based on their pandemic experience **7shifts** has reviewed its current remote work policy and reimagined a new environment where employees can choose to work 100% remote, hybrid or fully in office. The new policy includes an allowance for those working fully remote to aid in purchasing office equipment needed for effective work from home arrangements.

The future of work at **Tanium** has been designed to align with their culture and values and assure the best employee experience through resources, connection, wellness, development, and leadership. At its heart is a remote-first approach that provides team members with the flexibility and autonomy to work where and how they are most productive and engaged. Moving forward, leadership has announced that Tanium team members can work from anywhere. A Back to Business Task Force has been established to advance Tanium's strategy for operating in the "new normal" of a fully distributed workforce and customer base.

## Has the Pandemic Made Us Stronger?

**"What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger"**

Friedrich Nietzsche, 1888

Confronted by extreme adversity, individuals and organizations can either retreat and succumb... or adapt and thrive. While current realities and workplace experience continue to evolve through the pandemic, it seems clear from the perspective of the Best Workplaces in Canada that the most central and fundamental changes experienced to date will be enduring and for the better post-pandemic. Implicit across the game changing themes highlighted in this 3-part series is a powerful and transformative formula for long term success built on a newly strengthened foundation of organizational agility, innovation and trust forged and honed by the shared experience, values and behaviours of leaders, teams and employees coming together in response to an unprecedented and, indeed, existential shared threat.

Emerging from the pandemic will be stronger organizations and people empowered and supported by more flexible and inclusive environments, rules of work, and mindsets to succeed not only during the good times that lie ahead but also, perhaps more importantly, during the difficult times that will inevitably arise to challenge and indeed threaten us once again.



# Want to become a Best Workplace?

## About Us

For 30 years, Great Place to Work® has worked with leading companies from around the world to identify and build high-trust, high-performance workplace cultures. Our research has proven that building great workplaces for all isn't just the right thing to do, it's better for business.

Great Place to Work® conducts the world's largest workplace study with 60 offices, globally. We've surveyed over eight thousand organizations annually and heard what over twelve million employees had to say.

Get in touch today to begin your journey to a better workplace.

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