

ECHO

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL HUMAN RESOURCES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

OMHRA President, Lori Bolton

More and more, we are coming to understand the positive impact of equity and inclusion on employee engagement and well-being. This issue of ECHO explores ways human resource leaders may help foster workplaces that are cooperative, collaborative, fair and accountable.

Our One-Day Symposiums held in May and June also delved into these themes.

The event in May brought together a series of speakers to provide insight into how HR leaders may help guide their colleagues through new transformations before they have had time to finish adjusting to the last change. In June, we discussed ways that HR leaders may strengthen accountability and build deeper trust and commitment from their employees.

We are now more than half-way through our One-Day Symposium series for 2021. In October, we will focus on Healthy Workplaces and November's theme is Navigating Employee Momentum. Details on these events will be released in the coming months.

If you bought a series package, please make certain to use up all of your tickets before the series ends in November.

The Education Committee is currently planning a "Lunch and Learn" webinar series to take place over the course of July and August. These will be 45-minute presentations on a variety of topics that will be offered free to OMHRA Members. Check your inbox for details in the next few weeks.

Every year, we look forward to bringing our membership together for our Fall Conference and Annual General Meeting to learn about developments in the practice of human resource management and to network with our colleagues from across the province. We were hoping to be able to convene in person for this event in 2021; however, in light of the on-going pandemic, the Board has made the decision to hold a virtual event again this coming September.

Please watch for an Alert regarding the nominations process to join the Board as a Member at the Annual General Meeting and how you might submit an application. There are a few vacancies on the Board and the Alert will provide information pertaining to the skills and qualifications that we will be seeking to ensure a diverse and well-rounded board.

In addition to our professional development activities since our last update, OMHRA has become an active participant in the Communities of Practice tables supported by WSIB's Grants Program to enable learning and sharing of knowledge and expertise among key stakeholders to improve programs and services – and therefore the quality of care – for First Responders in Ontario through WSIB.

We are also providing subject matter expertise to AMO on the mental health collaborative tables established by the province to better support the mental health and well-being of police, fire and paramedic services personnel. These tables will help inform actions to change behaviours that stigmatize mental health challenges, achieve a healthier work-life balance, promote mental health resiliency, and build awareness of supports, treatments and recovery options.

OMHRA is changing its Information Systems provider at the end of June. We will be launching a new website and association management database in July, which will allow members to better manage their profiles, event registrations and payments.

As a result of this change, the LRIS will be off-line from the end of June until September.

More details about this change will be forthcoming. Please know that we will still be able to provide you with information about the more than 1,400 in force and expired agreements we have in our library while the system is down. You only need contact Benita Jenkins at customerservice@omhra.ca with your requests.

Once the LRIS is relaunched, it will contain collective agreements for police services, fire services, paramedic services, transit services as well as the municipal long-term care sector and inside/outside workers. Don't forget to submit any agreements you have going back to 2015 if you have not already. Those may also be sent to customerservice@omhra.ca.

We apologize for the inconvenience this will cause you, but we are certain that we will be able to provide you with a more functional database as a result of these changes.

COVID-19 has highlighted the capacity of human resource leaders to collaborate and get things done. Now, we must use what we have learned to create a more equitable world. We will come through this pandemic stronger and more understanding of how we may all support inclusive workplaces.

The light at the end of the tunnel is shining brighter every day.



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ASK ME ANYTHING

This question comes from **Sarah Bray**, who is completing her Human Resources Management post-graduate certificate at Conestoga College as part of completing her BA in Health Administration at Wilfrid Laurier

“Even entry level jobs in HR ask for a number of years experience which you can’t get until you get a job! What advice would you give a new grad trying to get their first job in HR? Where to look, resources, or any other tips?”



“You are absolutely right, Sarah. Even with entry level HR positions there is still a number of years experience that can be required and trying to get that experience can be difficult. There are a few ways to address this. The first is through the post secondary program you graduate from. Some programs offer opportunities to get involved in workplaces like cooperative education programs, internships and capstone projects. This can provide some basis for experience that is structured and monitored through the post secondary institution. Another way to access experience is volunteer work. If you can connect with an organization that has volunteer work available you could also gain valuable experience there.

As an HR recruiter I would also tell you that that any involvement with an organization as a volunteer or student work affords you the opportunity to demonstrate your abilities and work ethic, which is not easy to evaluate through a job interview. It creates connections through networking and could create additional project work based on your abilities that are demonstrated.

I would also suggest that recent grads be open to other work that may not be the desired HR work. This still gets you in an organization that likely does have HR work and could have opportunities open up for you. HR is an extremely broad field of work and there are many jobs not in an HR department that would create HR experiences – working with people, project work, and the health and safety aspects on any job. These experiences could provide “equivalencies” of the experience required for the HR positions. If you have an area of HR that you think you want to work in, be open to opportunities in other areas. The more experiences you can gain in any area of HR will help you to determine the type of work that will keep you engaged for your career. The last thing I would suggest is that you stay open to opportunities that are not full-time permanent positions. There are contracts that have a specified term that can still provide opportunities for you.



All the best to you in your job search!”

Response provided by Kathy Weidhaas
Director of Human Resources
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THE FUTURE OF WORK – LEADING DISTRIBUTED (HYBRID) TEAMS

Anita Mehta, Town of Newmarket, Learning and Development Program Specialist

With the pandemic slowing down with mass vaccination clinics and public health measures, we now see glimmers of hope and are finding ourselves in a “new normal”. For many of us who traded our office space to working from home, we are still unsure what the future will look like for us. With more sophisticated technology and online collaboration tools, we now have more options for collaboration with our teams and colleagues. The post-pandemic workplace is now a range and may often be based on individual choice. Whether we will be working fully in the office or fully remote or both, this is a significant learning opportunity for people leaders.

Here are some strategies and tools people leaders can use when leading distributed teams.

Creating a remote work culture

This means that the mindset and behaviours of leaders must be that whether an employee is in the office or remote, the experience needs to be the same. It’s important that all processes are inclusive for remote staff and that all meetings (even those who are in the office) are held virtually.

Communication is Key

We are always tempted to schedule video calls, or arrange presentations at convenient times. You might expect that your remote workers will answer your messages promptly and as quickly as someone who is in the office but the reality is that it won’t be the case. Here are some basic rules of communication:

- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate – consistently over-communicate with context with all staff whether they are working remotely or on-site.
- Only schedule meetings which are necessary – ask yourself, does this warrant a meeting or can it be communicated via email?
- Always ask your team for their availability (onsite and remote teams) before scheduling your meetings and always provide an agenda.
- Use specific tools for communication amongst the whole team (i.e. MS Teams, SharePoint, Zoom, etc.)

Leverage Technology and Invest in the Best Tools

Building a strong community is important to develop an engaged workplace for both remote workers and onsite teams. Through the use of virtual platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, you can still celebrate milestones like birthdays, organization milestones (i.e. years of service) or it can be leveraged for teams to stay connected. When we are deliberate about creating a community, it helps develop a corporate culture that inspires connection, which in turn will result in increased productivity.

Remember, to make collaboration work for everyone, there is one general rule: Unless every person is in the same room, all meetings are to be held over telephone/video conference.

Establish Close Bonds, Help and Support Frequently

Too often, it is easy to relegate remote staff to secondary consideration. This can be overcome with virtual meetings and staff partnerships. Engage with your remote staff on a daily basis through some kind of communication. Use multiple channels to communicate. Then, plan a regularly scheduled face-

to-face meeting. This should be done weekly, and could be combined with a training or coaching program. This constant interaction and engagement will help remote staff feel included in all important aspects of the organization.

On the management end, check in frequently (daily) using collaboration tools, shared docs, phone calls, chat, and video to invest in the relationship. For staff who are onsite, you will also want to check in frequently through face-to-face meetings.

Have Flexible Working Arrangements for Different Types of Workers

You should not impose the same expectations on your remote workers that should be used for your in-office staff.

Create a Hybrid Work Schedule

Whether you are working onsite or remotely, the reality is that distributed teams work differently. It's important to plan ahead to enable successful collaboration. A hybrid work schedule is a clear plan that maps out how both teams will collaborate. Get feedback from your team and make adjustments when needed.

One of the most important things you would like to establish is to start to create a hybrid team culture that encourages your remote workers to be transparent, open, and communicative. It is also critical to encourage openness. A hybrid work environment will be likely encounter conflict and it is up to our people leaders to manage. Have regular check-in meetings about how well working as a hybrid team is working for you and your staff.

Ensure Leader Buy-In

Building trust, encouraging accountability, and communicating openly will go a long way in strengthening the hybrid work culture. It is unrealistic to expect people leaders to know how to lead a hybrid team without training. While a lot of their expertise will come from experience, there is a need to actively learn about it.

The pandemic has forced us to reimagine our workplaces and created opportunities to optimize it. No matter where or how our staff work, the experience matters, especially when it comes to employee engagement.

A hybrid work environment that is set up correctly can become an experience that gives employees what they need to feel connected and empowered. When employees and their experiences come first, and their true value is well-understood, that results in empowering your workforce to take charge of their future and the organization's success.

IMPORTANT DECISION ON FAMILY STATUS DISCRIMINATION

Evan Campbell & Catherine Phelps, Lawyers, Miller Thompson LLP

In *Kovintharajah v Paragon Linen & Laundry Services Inc.*, 2021 HRTO 98 (“*Paragon Linen*”) the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (the “Tribunal”) provided clarity on the test for family status discrimination and awarded one of the highest ever damages awards for this class of discrimination.

Requests for accommodation on the basis of family status have been on the rise for all municipal employers in response to the additional pressures on families caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This important decision offers insight to municipal employers on how to navigate family status accommodation.

The Facts

The applicant worked as a machine operator at the respondent’s commercial laundry facility. The applicant and his wife had three young children aged 6, 4 and 2, and also lived with his wife’s elderly parents. The applicant’s in-laws had significant health and mobility issues and were not able to care for the children for more than a few minutes at a time. As a result, either the applicant or his wife had to be at home almost all the time.

In 2016, after returning to the workforce following her last pregnancy, the applicant’s wife found a job where she worked an evening shift from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. The applicant approached the respondent and asked that he be permitted to leave work at 2:30 p.m. so he could care for the children while his wife was at work. The respondent approved the applicant’s request for accommodation and allowed the applicant to work from 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

In the summer of 2017, the respondent posted a notice stating that employees would only be permitted to leave their shifts early twice a month and with 48 hours’ notice. This new policy was implemented by a new general manager with the aim of enforcing compliance with the schedule and ending the “grave train.”

The applicant believed that this new policy did not impact his existing accommodation and so he continued to leave work at 2:30 p.m. In response, the general manager imposed progressive discipline on the applicant, including a written warning and a five-day suspension. Within weeks of the new policy being implemented, the respondent terminated the applicant for cause for violating the policy.

Prior to his termination, the applicant had taken steps to cooperate with the respondent with respect to his accommodation. After his initial discipline, the applicant advised the respondent that his wife was seeking to change her work schedule so he could remain at work until 4 p.m., but that it would take a few months before this new arrangement could be put in place. For its part, the respondent made no efforts to work with the applicant on his accommodation and instead enforced zero-tolerance for violation of the scheduling policy.

Key Takeaways for Municipal Employers

Municipal employers should note that the Tribunal in *Paragon Linen* clarified that the test for family status discrimination in Ontario is no different than any other protected ground covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code. That is, the applicant must establish that they are a member of a protected group, that they have experienced adverse treatment, and that the ground for discrimination was a factor in the adverse treatment.

The *Paragon Linen* decision is also helpful in identifying what is required of the duty to accommodate in the family status context. The Tribunal found that the applicant took appropriate steps to engage in the accommodation process by advising the new general manager of his family status and investigating possible solutions, including having his wife change her shift. The respondent did not engage in the accommodation process and instead immediately imposed disciplinary measures culminating in termination. The Tribunal held that by failing to participate in the accommodation process, the employer failed in its procedural and substantive duty to accommodate the applicant's family status needs.

This decision offers an important reminder for municipal employers to meaningfully engage in the accommodation process with employees who are in these circumstances. The Tribunal has made it clear



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that family status obligations must be taken just as seriously as any other protected ground under the Human Rights Code.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT NIAGARA REGION

Rachel Hollingsworth, Health & Safety Program Advisor, Niagara Region

Like many organizations, burnout and compassion fatigue were emerging trends among our employees, especially those providing essential services and frontline healthcare. There was an urgent need to remind all employees of the supports that were available to them, to access them and practice self-care throughout the work day.

To ensure that our employees felt recognized and supported for their ongoing commitment to and dedication throughout the pandemic, a dedicated COVID-19 Staff Resources page was created to house relevant information related to changing work requirements, but also a Mental Health and Well-Being Library. The Mental Health and Well-Being Library was created to be a central location to find information about not only our Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), but also other valuable, relevant and free complementary resources and services to help address emerging trends of burnout and compassion fatigue and support and promote overall well-being.

The library is sectioned into the following categories and is consistently reviewed and updated with relevant information:

Resources & Information: Contains tips and other relevant information to help support health and well-being during the pandemic

Self-Care: Contains examples, guides and videos of how to practice self-care

Skill Building: Contains programs and apps to help develop coping skills and strategies

Mental Health and Wellness Services: Contains links to free available mental health and well-being services, including government funded iCBT (Beacon Stronger Minds and AbilitiCBT)

Frontline Healthcare Provider Resource: Contains specific supports, resources, peer support and information for frontline healthcare workers

Zoom Self-Care and Well-being Sessions: A calendar of free zoom self-care and well-being sessions on a variety of topics (e.g. batching cooking, yoga, self-care, parenting during the pandemic, etc.)

2021 Health & Wellness Fund Applications: A time limited initiative where any employee could submit an application for funds to start a health and wellness initiative for the work teams and work area.

In addition to the dedicated Mental Health and Well-being Library a corporate communications campaign was created to continuously promote these resources, highlighting the programs, and services to support emotional, psychological and social well-being.

The communication campaign also included bringing further awareness to our EFAP programs and services and reminding employees that in addition to short term counselling there are a variety of other programs to help support their health and well-being.

Communications focused on topics such as self-care, mental fitness, physical health, social connections and healthy relationships and provided employees with toolkits, links to services, videos, articles, etc. and were pushed out through all available corporate communication channels and platforms (e.g.

intranet banners and articles, weekly E-newsletters to all employee email accounts, LifeWorks Total Well-being platforms, etc.). Key messages such as the importance of self-care and taking the time throughout the work day to practice self-care, were further endorsed by our CAO through corporate communications and email updates.

A targeted communication campaign featuring onsite EFAP interventions and Psychological Safety Talks was also created for our Long-Term Care employees in Seniors Services. Psychological Safety Talks on topics such as Burnout and Compassion Fatigue, Self-Care, Sleep Habits, Free Frontline Healthcare Worker Resources and included access to EFAP and other related resources, supports and services were emailed to employees and delivered by some managers in person.

Key takeaways from our organization is the value of the dedicated Mental Health and Well-being Library and the importance of ongoing promotion of the available programs like EFAP, and the complementary services, in conjunction with the communications campaign on important mental health and well-being topics like self-care, emotional health, mental fitness, physical fitness, and social connectedness. These initiatives have kept employees self-aware and more accountable for their health, and have resulted in an increase in utilization of a variety of EFAP programs, and an increase in employee engagement with the dedicated COVID-19 Staff Resources page, specifically the Mental Health and Well-being Library. The ultimate success of these initiatives is our leadership's encouragement to employees to access these supports and the importance of self-care, including their endorsement to take time throughout the workday to practice self-care.

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION – ARE THEY THE SAME?

Sreya Roy, Lawyer & Human Resource Advisor, Bernardi Human Resource Law LLP

Before you continue reading this article, take a moment to define two words: diversity and inclusion. Is there any difference between the two? Are there any similarities?

Recently, there has been a widespread call for implementing diversity and inclusion (“D&I”) strategies in our workplaces. We now know that D&I is good for business. It leads to more productive employees; promotes innovation and different ways to problem-solve; promotes collaboration which could help capture new clients; and most importantly, it boosts morale and leads to happier employees.

But despite well-intended efforts by organizations, D&I initiatives often fail. Why? This is primarily because D&I is often lumped together, without much consideration given to the meaning of these terms. Diversity and inclusion are not synonymous. Most organizations fail to realize that it is possible to diversify and not be inclusive. Just because an organization is hiring diverse candidates does not mean that they are inclusive. Failure to realize the difference between diversity and inclusion may render the diversification efforts meaningless.

What is Diversity?

Diversifying a workplace primarily involves recruiting candidates with various lived experience. Diversity means recognizing, seeking out, and including differences in our workplace.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (“OHRC”) defines diversity as, “the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within an individual, group or organization”. Diversity includes such factors as age, sex, race, ethnicity, physical and intellectual ability, religion, sexual orientation, educational background and expertise. Most of these factors are embedded in our human rights legislation, while other factors like education and professional expertise may not be part of the legislation, but they may nevertheless play a significant role in shaping a person’s identity. Diversity at work is a relational concept that speaks to differences among people in the workplace.

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion is about eliminating barriers to full participation at work. It means designing spaces, policies and practices that are inclusive for everyone. The OHRC defines inclusion as “appreciating and using our unique differences – strengths, talents, weaknesses and frailties – in a way that shows respect for the individual and ultimately creates a dynamic multi-dimensional organization”.

Inclusion means valuing and respecting people’s differences. Inclusion in our workplace refers to putting systems in place to ensure that differences are taken into account and celebrated. Systems could include things like policies and procedures, workplace culture, formal and informal behaviours. The goal is to create a space where employees from diverse backgrounds feel respected, valued, accepted and safe to meaningfully participate at work.

In short, we need inclusive workplaces to retain a wide range of diverse talents.

Tips for Addressing Diversity and Inclusion:

Diversity

To increase diversity at your workplace, consider reflecting on the following questions:

- Are candidates from diverse identities applying for our jobs?
- What steps can we take to broaden the pool of qualified diverse candidates?
- Do we need to change our recruitment strategies to attract more diverse candidates?
- Are we hiring diverse candidates?

Below are some considerations when examining or developing your diversity efforts:

- **Limit informal recruitment and promotions:** using personal networks like company sports teams, social relationships and word-of-mouth referrals to recruit or promote may stifle your organization's efforts to diversify. These practices may lead to unconscious biases creeping in.
- **Limit hiring based on "fit":** it is well established that we tend to gravitate towards people who are like us. Our hiring decisions are no different. To mitigate this and other unconscious biases, it is important that criteria for hiring are clearly defined and tied to the organization's values and vision.
- **Be creative in your job searches:** canvass ways to search beyond your traditional means of recruitment. For example, post to different job boards or encourage your recruiters to reach out to promising candidates who are not actively seeking other opportunities.

Inclusion:

Here are some suggestions for retaining diverse candidates at your workplace through your inclusivity efforts:

- **Promote safe spaces:** create safe, non-judgmental, spaces for employees to have difficult conversations. Safe spaces will allow for meaningful discussions to take place about difficult topics, such as unconscious biases, racism, etc.
- **Implement formal mentoring opportunities:** informal mentoring where leaders select employees to provide mentorship in social settings outside work can result in diverse employees being marginalized. Lacking mentorship may act as a barrier to retaining qualified candidates.
- **Review your management practices:** are certain employees being managed or disciplined more than others? Excessive monitoring and documentation of performance or deviation from written policies or standard practices may act as barriers for diverse employees. Discipline should be applied fairly and consistently, and management practices should be based on business needs and other legitimate grounds.

Efforts to diversify a workplace will not last without efforts to make the workplace inclusive. Diversity and inclusion go hand in hand. The lawyers at Bernardi would be happy to work with you to help create a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Collective Bargaining During COVID-19: Bargaining for Mental Health Benefits

Grant Nuttall and Brittany Bates, Hicks Morley Hamilton Stewart Storie LLP

It is needless to say that COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on our daily lives. Many people are facing stressful or overwhelming situations that impact their emotional wellbeing. While public health measures such as social distancing are needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, these measures can contribute to feelings of loneliness, and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Municipal employers may want to consider how these issues can be assisted at the bargaining table. Unions will often seek increases to employee benefits through collective bargaining. Municipalities should consider these proposals carefully and may wish to respond by proposing improvements or reallocating benefits coverage to mental health treatments during the next round of bargaining.

Advantages for Municipalities as Employers

By improving or reallocating benefits coverage to mental health treatments, employers are investing in the overall wellbeing of their employees. Such an investment can have a number of positive effects for employers, including:

- ❖ **Reduction in misuse of benefits:** Employees may be less likely to abuse or misuse mental health benefits, as these benefits require employees to attend appointments with a mental health professional. Employees may also wish to attend these treatments on an as needed basis. This is in contrast to a benefit such as massage therapy, where employees may be more likely to use the benefit even when the treatments are not needed.
- ❖ **Reduction in absences and increase in productivity:** Issues with mental health or “burn-out” may lead to increased use of sick time or “presenteeism”. By providing employees with greater benefits for mental health treatment, this may in turn reduce employee absenteeism and increase productivity.
- ❖ **Reduction in liability for human rights and other claims:** Employees struggling with mental health conditions can give rise to human rights disability claims or others like chronic mental stress claims through workers’ compensation. These cases can be very complex and costly to adjudicate. By providing employees with improved benefits for mental health treatment, employers may reduce the number of these claims made, as well as their associated costs. For example, an employee may have excessive absences due to an untreated mental health condition, which could lead to a termination for non-culpable absenteeism, and a subsequent wrongful dismissal claim. This situation could possibly be avoided or mitigated by providing employees with greater coverage for mental health treatment.
- ❖ **Mutual benefits:** Unions will generally be seeking to improve benefits in collective bargaining on behalf of their membership anyway. Improving or reallocating benefits coverage for mental health treatment could be a mutually beneficial improvement, particularly in the context of a pandemic when this could be a higher priority item for the union’s membership.

What to Consider When Making the Improvement or Reallocation

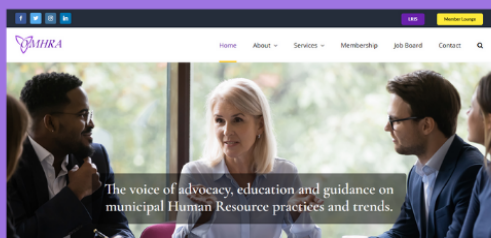
If you are considering improving or reallocating benefits coverage to mental health treatments, it is important to be mindful of the coverage plan's language and to consult legal counsel and/or your insurer before making any such change.

The following are other important points to consider when choosing to improve or reallocate benefits coverage to mental health treatments:

- ❖ **Plan coverage:** Some benefits coverage plans only cover treatment from certain professionals like Clinical Psychologists. As our understanding of mental health conditions has improved, there are now more types of mental health resources. These resources may include things like psychiatry or social work, which may be valued by employees with certain mental health conditions. More varied coverage could therefore reflect these needs.
- ❖ **Mental health benefits as a distinct benefit:** Municipalities can consider treating mental health benefits as their own distinct benefit. Many coverage plans group mental health benefits with other paramedical benefits such as chiropractic, physiotherapy and massage therapy. Having mental health benefits in their own distinct group can allow for a different cap and allocation and help ensure that these benefits will be used properly, as opposed to being grouped with benefits that may be subject to greater misuse.



Grant Nuttall is a lawyer at Hicks Morley who specializes in labour and employment matters facing municipalities. Brittany Bates is a summer student at Hicks Morley. If you have any questions about this article or any other employment matter, do not hesitate to contact Grant at 416.864.7262. He may also be reached by email at grant-nuttall@hicksmorley.com.



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MENTAL HEALTH POST PANDEMIC: FINDINGS AND TIPS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Marnie Downey, R.Kin., M.Sc., CCPE, Ergo Inc.

The Canadian Institute for Safety, Wellness & Performance (CIWSP) recently released the results of a national survey of the impacts of working from home during the pandemic on the mental and physical well-being on Canadians. The study included 1617 respondents (79% based on Ontario), of whom over 90% were working full time hours from their homes.

For many Canadians, the change to working from home has been a reality for over a year. However, the impact of this change in our lifestyle is continuing to have ongoing effects on both mental and physical well-being.

Over 80% of respondents reported being worn out at the end of the work day and 70% reported symptoms of stress, including frustration. Those living with dependents reported higher levels of burnout and stress. In addition, over a third of respondents indicated that work interfered with home and family life.

Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that they had a dedicated work space in their homes. However, over 30% of individuals did not have an adjustable chair and 35% reported working directly on their laptops without external devices.

As Ergonomists, we have been encouraging employees and employers to make arrangements to take home, at minimum, their external keyboards and mice. For too long, we have all been treating workstations as “temporary” and have not dedicated the time to setting them up correctly. We are too far into

Mental Health Toolkit Card

TIPS & STRATEGIES
Perform these activities regularly throughout the workday to help manage stress.



Tidy up your desk, sort & file e-mails



Stretch – your neck, back, shoulders and hands



Talk to someone



Stay hydrated



Take a walk



Keep a journal



Look out a window



Read a joke or watch a funny video



Praise a colleague for a job well done



Take the stairs



Just Breathe!
In through your nose, out through your mouth

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this pandemic not to be prioritizing our well-being and getting our workstations set-up properly.

It comes as no surprise then, that 70% of respondents reported experiencing stress and strain at the end of their working day. Perhaps more concerning is that 25% of respondents rated their general health as poor or fair.

Despite these results indicating that Canadians are struggling both physically and mentally from the switch to working from home, 70% of respondents indicated a desire to continue to work from home in some capacity post-pandemic. So where does that leave us if we want to protect the health and well-being of our staff and for ourselves?

Check how you are doing by completing these questions.

QUICK MENTAL HEALTH CHECK:

You should be able to answer "Yes" to the following:

- Do you know what is expected of you at work?
- Do you feel able to manage your workload?
- Do you feel able to manage and prioritize multiple demands?
- Do you regularly take your assigned breaks?
- Do you feel that you have good work-life balance?
- Do you feel equipped to handle confrontation at work (from clients, colleagues, etc.)?
- Do you feel comfortable raising concerns about psychological safety in your workplace?
- Can you recognize signs of psychological distress? (reduced ability to concentrate, excessive fear/worry, withdrawal from friends & family, difficulty sleeping, etc.)

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MROO's HEALTH AND DENTAL INSURANCE PROGRAM

Holly Murphy, Head of Retiree Benefits, Vice President, Victor Canada

There have been many ups and downs in the battle to beat COVID-19 since it became a pandemic in March of 2020. We have all witnessed the devastating impact that the virus has had on our health care services in Ontario and around the world. However, it seems that brighter days are ahead, as the Ontario Government recently announced their three-step plan to gradually and safely reopen the province.

Many of our MROO health care policyholders have asked us what impact COVID-19 has had on our Health and Dental Insurance and claims experience. What has changed? How has COVID-19 affected our ability to receive health care over the last year and a half?

COVID-19 and mental health

For our policyholders who are over age 50, claims experience is similar to plans for other age groups, such as group plans. In terms of our Health and Dental Care Insurance, we have not seen any change in the types of claims we have received during COVID-19. Even when we looked at the top ten most frequently used drugs in the last year, the list did not include drugs for depression. However, we are not able to identify the mental health impact of the pandemic on our members, since we do not offer disability coverage.

Hospital care benefit—a look ahead

The benefit that could be impacted by COVID-19 over the next year or two is the hospital care benefit. The MROO health care plan has shown a small decrease in hospital claims since March 2020 due to limitations in hospital admissions. Last March, Christine Elliott, our Deputy Premier and Ontario Minister of Health, released a statement to say the province was requesting that all hospitals carefully ramp down “elective surgeries and other non-emergent activities” in order to create capacity to care effectively for patients with COVID-19.¹ Hospitals have not fully opened up again since for non-COVID care.

Hospital claims under the MROO Health Insurance plan and other health care plans will likely increase once hospitals ramp up non-urgent and non-emergency procedures and surgeries on a consistent basis. Delays in hospital surgeries has been—and still is—a big concern for many. Services for non-urgent hospital care have been sporadic during the pandemic to date.

The Ontario Medical Association has been tracking the growing backlog of deferred and delayed routine exams, vaccinations, diagnostic tests, treatments and non-emergency surgeries.² Some Ontarians have seen treatable conditions worsen, and have even died, because of these delays. Unprecedented times indeed.

This May, The Financial Accountability Office projected the backlog of cancelled surgeries will reach 419,200 procedures by the end of September and it will take more than three and a half years to clear this backlog.³ Their office also estimated it would cost the province \$1.3 billion to clear the backlog.⁴ On a positive note, the most recent Ontario budget included an investment of an

additional \$5.1 billion to support hospitals since the pandemic began, creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds. This also includes \$1.8 billion in 2021–22 to continue providing care for COVID-19 patients, address surgical backlogs and keep pace with patient needs.

At the time of writing this article, the province is preparing to ramp up hospital non-elective surgeries. Patients being treated for the coronavirus are relatively high with 1,401 people hospitalized; however, new cases are trending downward. Let's hope the end is insight.

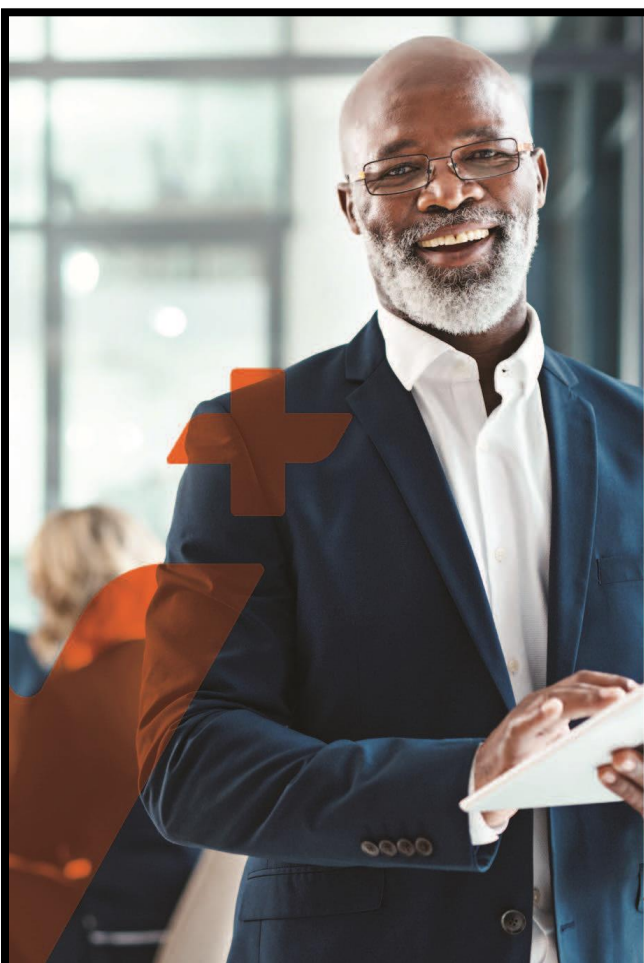
For more information about the MROO retiree insurance program, visit us at www.mrooinsurance.ca/vplus or call us at 1-800-363-7861. <https://bit.ly/2TQpkOD>

¹"Ontario hospitals to ramp down elective surgeries as COVID-19 cases surge", *CityNews* (April 9, 2021), online: [Ontario hospitals to ramp down elective surgeries as COVID-19 cases surge - CityNews Toronto](#)

²"Ontario's doctors urge government to commit necessary resources to clear pandemic backlog", *Ontario Medical Association News Release* (May 11, 2021), online: [Ontario's doctors urge government to commit necessary resources to clear pandemic backlog \(oma.org\)](#)

³"COVID-19: Ontario's fiscal watchdog says surgical backlog will take more than 3.5 years to clear", *Global News* (May 10, 2021), online: [COVID-19: Ontario's fiscal watchdog says surgical backlog will take more than 3.5 years to clear | Globalnews.ca](#)

⁴"Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy", *2021 Ontario Budget* (March 2021), online: [2021 Ontario Budget | Ontario.ca](#)




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FOSTERING A CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS THE MENTAL HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES

Marc Avaria, Vice President, Product & Disability Management, Medavie Blue Cross

As the emotional challenges of the pandemic continues, many workplaces are exploring new ways they can proactively support employees who may be experiencing early signs of anxiety, depression or other related issues – before things reach the stage of a potential disability leave.

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in any given year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental illness or addiction problem. Perhaps even more alarming for employers, the same research shows seventy-five per cent of working Canadians would either be reluctant to admit, or would not admit, to a leader or colleague that they have a mental illness.

Protecting the health and wellbeing of employees often starts with fostering an organizational culture that promotes openness, understanding and support around mental health.

Now more than ever, there is a greater demand for leaders to be more involved on the frontlines: enhancing their engagement and listening to individual employee concerns, such as work-life balance and other stressors in the workplace; or encouraging mental health days and self-care strategies. It is about taking the time to review existing Employee Assistance Programs, providing access to programs that promote wellbeing and helping employees understand what services are available to them through their benefits plan. Ideally, an employee stays at work and accesses the services and supports available to help them on their path to wellness.

Also, virtual care plays a significant role in reducing some of the biggest barriers to accessing care – cost, convenience, and stigma. With the rise in digital health and other technologies, many services now exist that can help employees get mental health



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supports, faster and in a more convenient way – often from the privacy and comfort of their home. For example:

- **Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT)**, or digital therapy, allows those diagnosed with mild to moderate anxiety, or depression, access to a dedicated therapist from a phone or computer, and a personalized treatment plan to help ensure a continuity of care.
- **Pharmacogenetic testing**, or personalized medicine, is a service that helps people, and their treating physicians, understand how genetic makeup and metabolism impact their response to different medications. The aim is to ensure that people are prescribed the right medication at the right dose to help get them on the path to wellbeing as soon as possible.
- **Access to a broader range of mental health practitioners.** In addition to psychologists and social workers, counselling therapists, psychotherapists and psychoeducators have been added to the roster of eligible practitioners under many benefit plans. As a result, employees struggling with mental illness now have more options to choose from in finding and working with a practitioner that best suits their needs.

These innovative tools and services are part of a broader suite of workplace mental health supports that are available to employees while they remain at work. This is about connecting people to the right level of care at the right time, while helping them quickly recover and achieve the best possible health outcomes.

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Rae Christen Jeffries



Refusals to RTW

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HOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR WORK FROM HOME REALITY: FLEX YOUR TRUST MUSCLE

Linda Allen-Hardisty, Queen's IRC Facilitator, 2021

The pandemic forced change in the way leaders interact with their employees, forcing many to adapt their approach in how they built trust and relationships with employees throughout the transition into working from home (WFH) practices. For many, this challenging year has actually provided them with a rare opportunity to lead stronger, with a new vision for their teams.

As we pass the one-year anniversary of WFH, this is an ideal time for strong leaders to assess how they are at building trust, and to identify what needs to be strengthened next, as the "new normal" and time of unknowns is still being shaped.

Like a fitness plan full of workouts (like weightlifting repetitions, cardio activities, and daily walking), strengthening your trust muscle requires use Every. Single. Day. Some muscles aren't used enough unless you intentionally aim to use them. It's not always easy, and you often feel a bit sore after a good workout; however, because you care about your health, you follow your fitness plan again tomorrow. This is the same for building, rebuilding and strengthening trust with your team of employees. Let's explore how each of these current WFH realities can be addressed by flexing your trust muscle.

WFH Reality #1 – How Do I Know?

It's shocking how much information is available on this question for leaders: "how do I know my employees are actually working?" I believe the first question to ask yourself is "how did I know before the pandemic?"

You may still be using some of your past practices, however it is likely that you have had to create new practices for your employee interactions. WFH is felt heavily within organizations that didn't have a robust culture of providing regular employee feedback on their work. Leaders now find themselves implementing totally new practices for employees to follow. In some cases, monitoring technology has been introduced, which is eroding trust and exhausting everyone involved.

Flex your Trust Muscle:

- **Pull on your empathy emotional intelligence:** Put yourself in your employees' shoes. Think about how you want to be asked to share what you accomplished today, and how you want your manager to interact with you about challenges and successes. This can put you in an effective mindset to seek input from each employee about what is working well for them and what is not as they perform their job duties.
- **Monitor with conversation not technology:** If you find that you are not seeing the results from an employee that you did pre-pandemic, then use the same process you did before like goalsetting, feedback and consulting your HR advisor. Employees still want to know what the expectations are of them during WFH. They want to know what is different and what is the same, and how you will handle an achievement or lack of performance on their part – one way is to seek to understand what might

have contributed to the situation. WFH for some employees is “working from home with my kids beside me doing online learning, the FedEx delivery truck ringing the doorbell, the dog not staying in the kennel, and aging parents needing help.” You do need to get at the heart of the issue – is it WFH challenges or performance challenges? These might not be the same.

WFH Reality #2 – Team Vision Has Changed

Regardless of how much time you spent recreating the team vision or not, know that it has organically changed, whether you intended it to or not. It changed. What a great opportunity to make it official!

Flex your Trust Muscle:

- **Lead an update of the team vision (One-year anniversary edition):** Yes, mark it and be intentional with your employees about carving out dedicated time to revisit your team vision or team charter. Ask questions of your employees about what to keep doing, stop doing, or start doing for key components of:
 - communication
 - goalsetting
 - relationship building
 - conflict handling
 - supporting each other

For example, for relationship building some leaders have made the first team meeting agenda item “Coffee Chat” before any agenda item comes up for business – in an effort to fill the gap of not seeing each other down the hall or in the lunchroom; while in-person experiences truly can’t be replaced, new actions can help fill parts of that gap. For now. To begin, start with this exercise:

Team Vision 1-year anniversary edition	Stop	Start	Continue
Communication			
How our team contributes to the organization’s vision			
Relationship Building			
Conflict Handling			
Supporting Each Other			
Other:			
Other:			

WFH Reality #3 – You as a Changing Leader

You are a different leader now. Yes, you are. First, congratulations on transitioning your team to WFH during this once-in-a-lifetime career event. Secondly, plan for your next piece of growth and improvement

Flex Your Trust Muscle:

- **Always ask “What is the learning here, Linda?”** My mentor used to ask me this all the time. Take honest stock of what you did well this year and what you did not. What did you learn about yourself?



- **Train your trust muscle for the next transition:** WFH is likely not going away completely. Many people believe we will evolve to another “new normal”, and things will not go back to the way it was for all organizations. So, get ready to build more trust with your employees because you will be leading them and collaborating with them into the next transition. In their book “Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader’s Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You”,¹ authors Frances Frei and Anne Morriss explain trust is the input that makes the leadership equation work: “If leadership is about empowering others, in your presence and your absence, then trust is the emotional framework that allows that service to be freely exchanged. I’m willing to be led by you because I trust you”. Reflect on how well you may be trusted by others, by using their trust triangle of authenticity, logic, and empathy. People tend to trust you when they think they are:
 - interacting with the real you (authenticity)
 - when they have faith in your judgement and competence (logic)
 - when they believe that you care about them and where they are coming from (empathy)

When trust is lost, you can almost always trace it back to a breakdown to one of these drivers. Ask yourself: You want others to trust you, right? Which one, if you had to pick, do you think you should strengthen? Pay more attention to it.

In summary, as leaders you can improve how you can trust that your employees are working at home by intentionally taking action on your own leadership fitness as outlined in these “Flex Your Trust Muscle” tips:

- Pull on your empathy emotional intelligence
- Monitor with conversation not technology
- Lead an update of the team vision (One-year anniversary edition)
- Always ask “What is the learning here?”
- Train your trust muscle for the next transition

WFH is still challenging everyone to keep learning new ways on how to work - and trust - virtually and effectively.

Linda Allen-Hardisty is the lead facilitator for the Queen’s University IRC Building Trust in the Workplace program. Queen’s IRC offers two- to five-day professional development programs in the areas of labour relations, human resources and organizational development. With over 80 years of experience, the IRC focuses on building better leaders with both virtual and in-person training across Canada.



¹ Frei, F. & Morriss, M. (2020). Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader’s Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.amazon.ca/Unleashed-Unapologetic-Leaders-Empowering-Everyone/dp/1633697045>.

WHAT POST PANDEMIC LEADERSHIP WILL LOOK LIKE FOR CANADA

Kartik Kumar, Partner, Legacy Executive Search Partners

The past year has been incredibly volatile across all industries. While some industries remained steady and stable, others suffered significantly. As we begin to emerge into a post-pandemic way of life, new beginnings will always call for new leadership and new perspectives. 2020 has required an incredibly unique set of leadership skills that were constantly challenged month after month with scandals, social justice issues, quarantine and climate change to name a few.

As restrictions begin to loosen with more and more Canadians being vaccinated, there are several critical leadership qualities and competencies that will serve leaders well in the public sector for a steady, safe and final reopening across Canada. Below are some of the leadership qualities I foresee as essential for leaders to transition public sector services and organizations into a post-pandemic life.

9 Critical Skills Leaders Will Need Post-Pandemic

Strong Digital Communicators As we saw throughout the pandemic, timely and factual information must be distributed to reach large audiences very quickly. Future leaders will need a balance of skills to understand how to best leverage communication platforms and tools such as tweeting and texting for urgent public alerts.

Adaptability As workforces begin to return to the office, new leaders will need to be adaptable and encourage a hybrid model of remote and in-person work. Future leaders will need to embrace this and shift the cultural perspective to value productivity over physical presence in an office. Most employees and teams understand the best ways they work and future leaders will have to flex and accommodate accordingly while keeping an eye on productivity.

Digital Transformation Champions As workforces went fully remote for over a year, many organizations were blind-sided by this drastic shift putting an immense strain on technology and resources. This unexpected transition to entirely digital delivery for services, meetings, events and more will remain with us even after the pandemic subsides. Future leaders will need to champion and continue to support a hybrid model for digital and in-person services to their communities and citizens even post-pandemic.

Transparency and Trust As we saw with scandals, social justice issues and even vaccination delays creeping into 2021, trust was fractured across the economy and Canada. Effective post-pandemic leaders will need to be transparent in order to build confidence and trust back up within governments, municipalities, public services and more in order to move past the severe impacts of COVID-19.

Tenacity, Courage and Resilience Many difficult decisions were made in 2020 that riddled industries including the public and private sector. In order for municipalities to recover from these hardships in the long-term, leaders will need to be bold, tenacious and resilient. Future leaders will need to redefine their strategic direction and vision after a year of diversion, delays and disruption, and take these skill sets with them into post-pandemic planning.

Motivation and Influence As we discussed earlier, trust and transparency will be critical to instill a renewed faith in governments and Canada's economy. As we emerge into a more familiar way of life, strong leaders will need to motivate and influence communities to impart a feeling of safety for restarting the economy again. By providing an initial assurance of comfort and trust through transparency, strong leaders will then be tasked with pursuing this momentum and convincing communities that the end of the pandemic has arrived through influence.

Empathy Even beyond catastrophic pandemic times, strong leaders must always remain empathetic for their teams and communities. In order to be successful, strong post-pandemic leaders must remain steadfastly empathetic and recognize the individuals and stakeholders that were essential to survival over the past 14 months. In addition, effective future leaders must be mindful and recognize the impact COVID-19 has and will continue to have on society's mental health. By remaining vigilant to these risks and possible side effects, leaders will be able to better support the well-being of their teams and their communities across Canada.

Collaboration and Partnership The pandemic has shown us the true benefits of collaboration and information sharing. Future leaders will need to heavily rely on partnership for building a new future together. Within the last year, there were key strategies and projects that worked well and others that were less successful. More often than not, collaboration and partnership attributed to Canada's success during a time of volatility and future leaders will need to continue building upon these relationships through collaboration.

Innovation and Flexibility Many municipalities, local governments and even libraries depended upon innovation to help them adapt to chaotic and unprecedented times. Post-pandemic leaders will need to lean heavily into innovation which will in turn demand flexibility. Whether leaders are tasked with finding alternative revenue streams, incentivizing workforces to return to the office or even accelerating new businesses to open and return to urban areas, creative thinking and flexibility will be a critical skill to set these initiatives in motion and course correct the future for Canada's economy.

During the pandemic many people and communities fled cities to suburban areas for more space and a better work life balance offered by remote working. As a result, these smaller non-urban satellite "Zoom Towns" needed to adapt quickly as residency increased and their micro economies grew. Below is one such example of a small municipality that met this challenge head on, and relied heavily on their innovative leaders and agile teams to plan and prepare for this.

Modernizing For Urban Lifestyle Through Innovative Leadership

As the pandemic subsides, the question arises for those that fled urban centers in search of more space and whether or not they will remain or return to the larger cities? Some will undoubtedly return to urban life, however, others have found a renewed appreciation for life outside of the city, such as the Town of Innisfil. [A recent article discussed the innovative ways that the small urban satellite Town of Innisfil](#), located 45 minutes outside of Toronto with a population of ~37,000, is reinventing itself through a highly nimble and flexible approach to economic development.

Today, the Town of Innisfill is challenging the status quo and applying learnings from their larger, more urban counterparts, allowing the Town to scale quickly and innovate quite literally from the ground up.

The Town of Innisfil is taking new measures for transformative city planning, public transit and more with its sights set on becoming a central GovTech hub for Canada.

Within the article, Dan Taylor, Economic Development Catalyst for the Town of Innisfil said, “The reason we’re able to be quite innovative is we’re small and nimble. Our senior administration and council are fairly closely aligned. So, we have great thinking in our leadership — both politically and administratively”. Taylor continued to add, “...Our Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) said, when we do economic development, we want to be an accelerator. We don't want to just be a facilitator. We want to put our foot on the gas and really play a different role”.

In order to keep their small community thriving post-pandemic they've decided to innovate in a few different ways including:

- Offering economic incentives for GovTech start-ups to relocate offices and establish headquarters in the Town of Innisfil away from the larger city centers, allowing talent to remain local and drive innovation centrally.
- Planning and building an urban environment zoned using concentric circles for streets and avenues. By building the infrastructure of a modern city-within-a-town, referred to as “The Orbit”, the Town of Innisfil will offer residents the benefits of city dwelling without overdevelopment and losing the intimate feeling of the Town.
- Piloting Uber as the Town’s main official form of public transit. This on-demand format of public transit reduces costs and increases efficiency as demand increases or subsides. By leveraging an existing platform through partnership and collaboration, the Town of Innisfil was able to plan and create a new mass transit system with little infrastructure investment.
- Accepting cryptocurrencies for residents to pay taxes. The Town of Innisfil has begun accepting digital cryptocurrencies from residents to pay for taxes.
- Planning a new rail transit to connect the Town of Innisfil directly with the neighboring city of Toronto to offer streamlined commuter options and increase connectivity to the larger central Canadian hub.

The Town of Innisfil was able to innovate and set these strategic plans in place as a result of their leadership. Instead of taking the traditional approaches to economic expansion and development, senior leadership within the public sector saw an incredible opportunity for true innovation and sought out creative solutions. As an entire collective municipality, the Town of Innisfil has resources readily available to drive these fresh, new and innovative programs. However, even on a much smaller scale, innovation knows no boundaries.

Innovation Within Canada’s Public Libraries for Today and Tomorrow

Another example of innovation on a much smaller scale, are the many ways in which leaders across Canada’s public libraries transformed, adapted and innovated as they were forced from a primarily in-person model to an entirely digital resource and online service.

[In a recent interview, Vickery Bowles of the Toronto Public Library](#) system, mentioned the ways in which the Toronto Public Library had to innovate and adjust as the pandemic thrust both the private and public sector into a digital transformation spiral.

Within the interview, Bowles commented on how the library was able to adapt. “The transition to the online environment was critical for people to give them the opportunity and to make these connections”. Bowles added, “Through a lot of innovative thinking, hard work and dedication on behalf of our staff, we dropped everything and we just focused on what we needed to do as a result of being closed and rethink how we deliver our services”.

Some of the small yet innovative ways that leadership within the Toronto Public library system met these challenges included:

Developing and Delivering Programs Virtually. Through webinar and video platform technology adoption, the Toronto Public Library was able to work with their team members to innovate, launch and deliver over 550 programs to over 40,000 attendees in under 6 months. These programs ranged from children’s story hours to yoga for young adults.

Curbside Pick Up and Drop Off. To keep book services available to communities while reducing the risk and spread of COVID-19, Toronto Public Libraries allowed for members to reserve items virtually and collect items in-person from a safe distance.

Waiving Late Fees. Libraries began waiving late fees due to quarantine guidelines and restrictions set in place at the beginning of the pandemic. Interestingly enough, the Library discovered that late fees were acting as a barrier to access for lower income families and members. By eliminating late fees, Toronto Public Library usage has increased across these communities - a core mission of the Public Library.

Strengthened Digital and Municipal Partnerships. By partnering with eBook platforms and offering a digital reader option to members, library membership increased during COVID-19 as individuals sought out alternative ways to engage their minds at home. Additionally, Toronto Public Library later partnered with food banks to offer their physical library branch spaces to them for delivering food services to the shared communities that both the Library and food banks serve.

Providing Equitable Internet Access for All. Some Toronto Public Library members depend heavily upon the availability of technology and internet access to participate in government programs, online education, etc. To continue providing these members equitable access and remain connected, Toronto Public Libraries innovatively developed internet connectivity kits that include a laptop, WiFi hotspot and laptop bag. These kits were designed to deliver these resource rich services all from the safety of a member’s own home.

Many of these new digital services and methods for the Toronto Public Library will remain ongoing post-pandemic due to their success. As a result of these innovative and flexible approaches, library membership has increased during the pandemic.

As we have seen, innovation and flexibility will remain top of mind as a core leadership skill set in our post-pandemic society. However, municipalities and public sector organizations will be challenged with identifying the best leaders and candidates that have cultivated and align with these leadership attributes.

Innovation, Diversity and Inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion has been a common thread and discussion point for many leadership teams across the public sector for over a decade at this point. New ways of adapting and growing will require fresh and new perspectives at the leadership level.

Oftentimes innovative leadership qualities are found within diversity candidates that can challenge the status quo to effectively impact change across the organization and community. Typically, diversity candidates have experienced and mitigated a lifetime of adversity and obstacles. These experiences, both professionally and personally, foster new ideas, creative thinking, innovation, agility and influence. However, the biggest challenge that the public sector faces when it comes to finding and appointing diversity talent at the leadership level includes:

- Access To Diversity Candidates
- Diversity Mandates Representation
- Elevating Inclusion to Allow Diversity to Flourish

Access To Diversity Candidates

Many municipalities see the value that diversity can bring to their leadership teams but don't know where to start their search for this elusive talent. For many years, organizations and municipalities unknowingly created a culture of homogeneity thus shrinking their own internal talent pipelines as a source for diversity talent. Instead, public and private sector organizations must partner with external experts to help identify, appoint and present the most qualified and capable diversity candidates for leadership roles. For example, in the past year, I've worked with several public sector organizations and municipalities to identify, hire and onboard several strong female leaders across Canada.

Diversity Mandates Representation

One element of diversity that some organizations fall victim to is the pressure to hire a diversity candidate as a check list item to appease public demand and stakeholders for visibility reasons. I've worked with many clients in my career as an executive search consultant, and the key to hiring a diversity candidate that can provide the best value to the community is the simple concept of representation.

I often challenge clients, counselors and hiring committees that request a diverse slate of candidates to examine what diversity looks like within their community internally and demographically. Sometimes the personification and perception of diversity by selection committees may not always align with the true values and representation of the communities they will be serving - this is critical when considering a diversity hire at the leadership level. As a best practice, a diversity candidate should be representative of the larger community in which they will serve, while also maintaining the leadership attributes required by the role.

Elevating Inclusion to Allow Diversity to Flourish

The other caveat that municipalities and public sector organizations overlook when hiring a diversity candidate is the necessary inclusivity training and acceptance of new and different perspectives by other

senior leaders. Inclusivity programs allow for the broader leadership team to adopt and best leverage new perspectives offered by diversity candidates in powerful ways. By elevating cultural sensitivities and awareness to the existing senior leadership team and creating a more inclusive culture, senior leaders can learn how to better work together and support one another. As a result, this awareness and inclusivity will increase collaboration and knowledge sharing and trickle down through the organization to more junior teams. As this cultural shift slowly takes place, success can be measured by the amount of diversity talent attracted to the organization, thus building an internal diversity talent pipeline for the future.



Kartik Kumar is a Partner at [Legacy Executive Search Partners](#) and has over 15 years experience in successfully executing 250 projects within the Public

and Private sector, including municipal government and public libraries. Kartik has a Bachelor's in Business Management from Ryerson University and an accredited certification in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University. Contact [Kartik Kumar](#) at kartik.kumar@lesp.ca for Senior Leadership Recruitment within the Public Sector across Canada.

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UNDERSTANDING THE NEW WORLD OF PAID INFECTIOUS DISEASE EMERGENCY LEAVE

Amanda Cohen and Samantha Sutherland, Hicks Morley Hamilton Stewart Storie LLP

On April 29, 2021, the Ontario government passed Bill 284, *COVID-19 Putting Workers First Act, 2021* amending the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* ("ESA") to provide eligible employees with three days of paid emergency leave where absences relate to a designated infectious disease ("Paid IDEL"). Eligible employees are therefore entitled to three days of paid emergency leave in circumstances of absences related to COVID-19. These amendments apply to all employees covered by the ESA, including both unionized and non-unionized groups. It is therefore important for municipalities to understand the amendments, this new benefit and how it will be applied.

Eligibility for Paid IDEL

As noted above, all employees covered by the ESA are eligible for Paid IDEL. This entitlement is provided in addition to any entitlements to unpaid infectious disease emergency leave ("Unpaid IDEL"). Where an employee qualifies for both Paid and Unpaid IDEL, the employee is entitled to receive their three days of Paid IDEL first, unless the employee makes an election in writing to receive Unpaid IDEL first.

Paid IDEL is available where an employee is unable to work for one of the following reasons related to COVID-19, including:

- The employee is under individual medical investigation, supervision or treatment (including receiving a vaccine and recovery from that vaccine)
- The employee is subject to an order under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (including an order closing down their employer's business)
- The employee is in quarantine or isolation or is subject to a control measure (which may include, but is not limited to, self-isolation)
- The employee has been directed by their employer to not attend work in response to a concern of the employer that the employee may expose other individuals in the workplace to the designated infectious disease
- The employee is providing care or support to certain listed family members because the individual is under individual medical investigation, supervision or treatment or the individual is in quarantine or isolation or is subject to a control measure (which may include, but is not limited to, self-isolation).

Payment of Paid IDEL and Reimbursement under the WSIB

Employees off work on Paid IDEL will be provided with the lesser of \$200.00 or the employee's regular rate of pay for the hours the employee would have worked had they not taken Paid IDEL. Where an employee receives performance-related wages, they will be entitled to the lesser of \$200.00 and the greater of either (i) their hourly rate or (ii) the minimum wage for the hours they would have worked had they not taken Paid IDEL.

The employer provides employees with their Paid IDEL payment but may apply to the WSIB for reimbursement. To qualify for such reimbursement, employers have to complete the application process with the WSIB within 120 days of the date on which the Paid IDEL was provided. Reimbursement payments from the WSIB are scheduled to begin by the end of June and will continue on a bi-weekly basis. An approved claim will take approximately two weeks to process.

Although the amendments occurred on April 29, 2021, Paid IDEL is retroactive to April 19, 2021. Municipalities will need to review any time off between April 19 and 29, 2021 to determine whether an employee may have an entitlement to Paid IDEL.

Interaction with Contractual Paid Leave

If an employee is entitled to paid leave under an employment contract or collective agreement as of April 19, 2021, their entitlement to Paid IDEL will be reduced by the number of days of the contractual entitlement provided the following conditions are met:

- the contractual paid leave must cover at least one of the circumstances for which the employee can take Paid IDEL;
- the employee must have paid leave entitlements under their employment contract remaining on April 19, 2021;
- the paid leave under the employment contract is at least as much as pay for Paid IDEL; and
- there cannot be extra conditions for taking paid leave under the employment contract.

This assessment is done in respect of each employee's available contractual entitlement, and any offsetting contractual entitlements will reduce the number of Paid IDEL days available to the employee. Employers will not be reimbursed by the WSIB where an employee uses a contractual paid leave day in lieu of a Paid IDEL day.



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Erin Smyth and **Liz Norwood** are East Gwillimbury's Human Resource Coordinators, both bringing a wealth of human resource and municipal experience to the HR Team. All members of the Human Resource team in East Gwillimbury pride themselves on being true HR Generalists, and as such, both Erin and Liz have responsibility for full-cycle recruitment, compensation & benefits, training & development, and employee & labour relations.

Liz achieved her Diploma in Business Administration with a certificate in Human Resources from Georgian College. She is a Certified Human Resources Leader (CHRL) and has worked for the Town of East Gwillimbury since 2007.



Erin achieved her Bachelors Degree in English and Sociology at Trent University before completing her Human Resources Management Diploma from Georgian College. She joined the Town of East Gwillimbury in 2016 and is a Certified Human Resources Leader.

By bringing their individual and specific related education and experience, Erin and Liz ensure the HR Team is well rounded and provides exceptional service to all departments at the Town of East Gwillimbury.

1. How has being a member of OMHRA benefited you in your career?

Liz: Having just joined OMHRA this year, I can see a multitude of benefits my membership will have in my career. Whether it's through the emails news updates and newsletters, or the more recent "One-Day Symposiums", I can tell that OMHRA is made up of like-minded individuals who are working together better each one of us in our careers and Human Resource professionals.

Erin: I am excited to have become a member of OMHRA this year. With the everchanging work landscape, it is crucial for Human Resources professionals to stay up to date on legislative changes and employment trends. Having a network of other professionals working in the same municipal field is a resource that has already proven to be valuable.

2. What are three adjectives your colleagues would use to describe you?

Liz: *Helpful* – I know that whenever I have a question, or want to bounce an idea off someone, I always go to Erin. Even if she doesn't know the answer, she will work through different options or ideas with me to help determine the best course of action.

Respectful – I can think of a hundred examples to give for this word, but without a doubt, Erin is one of the most respectful people I know. We deal with a lot of different personalities and a lot of difficult situations on a daily basis, and no matter how tedious some may be, Erin remains respectful and professional at all times.

Reliable – I think this is most important in a colleague, and something that Erin exemplifies. I know that if something comes up, and I need someone to step in or help out in short order, Erin will do whatever she can to assist. It's nice to know my colleague has my back.

Erin: *Collaborative* - I couldn't ask for a better colleague than Liz she is always willing to work through a project or issue together. No matter how busy she is with her own client groups, Liz is always willing to assist when needed. Being able to run an idea past a trusted colleague and gain different perspectives on approaches is invaluable.

Perseverance - We work in an extremely busy municipality, where priorities change daily. No matter what change in direction or new initiative we are given, Liz always takes it in stride. She's able to quickly re-focus to help us achieve our objectives.

Compassionate - I think that this is an important quality to have as an HR professional especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and Liz certainly demonstrates this daily. Her genuine interest in her colleagues helps to foster trust and build strong connections with her colleagues.

3. Did you have an important early influencer in your life? Could you reflect on their role in shaping you and perhaps preparing you to be a resilient leader?

We both would agree that **Michelle Collette** has played such an important role in both of our careers thus far. The incredible amount of knowledge and experience that she brings, not only to our team, but to the Town, is something that we do not take for granted. Michelle empowers us to take the lead in all aspects of our role as Human Resources Coordinator's, while ensuring that we are provided with the necessary guidance and mentorship to help us advance in our careers.

4. What did the pandemic in 2020 teach you and how have you used that to live a balanced lifestyle in 2021?

Liz: For me, the pandemic has taught me so much more than I would have initially thought. It has taught me patience, not only in my professional life, but also personally. When I think back to being in the office, when I needed an answer or to follow-up on something, it was as simple as walking down the hall to an office and getting that answer. Now, we're not having those quick face-to-face chats that could sometimes save hours in meetings or follow-ups. Being more patient and understanding of others priorities has been big for me.

As well, realizing that we're all living and dealing with something that most have never, and will never experience in their lifetime. Giving people grace as they navigate through uncharted waters, again in both their professional and personal life, has been a learning experience for me that will stick with me well after the pandemic is over (and it will be over!)

Erin: Like many others, I transitioned to working remotely at the beginning of the pandemic. Over the course of the last year, I have found that it can be very easy to get wrapped up in a day full of emails and meetings and I don't always get to connect with employees. This year has taught me to be much more intentional with my time. I used to take for granted the opportunity to connect with staff in the lunchroom or at summer BQQs. Whether it is scheduling check-in meetings with my client groups or

individual employees, I have found that it is important to stay connected and up-to-date on what is going with them so I know how I can best support them.

Understanding that I need to be intentional with my time has helped me to carve out a work-life balance that perhaps I did not have at the beginning of 2020. It is so important to make sure that I schedule time to get up, get outside, exercise and have some time away from my computer and emails. It gives me the opportunity to recharge so I can take on the challenges of the day!

5. What is your sliver lining or something you want to share about your COVID HR experiences?

Liz: Though COVID has taken away the ability to have those casual, in-person, conversations with colleagues, it has allowed me to connect with some staff that I wouldn't typically have the ability to. A lot of our staff are working at different work locations, outside of our Civic Centre. Now that we are all connected through Microsoft Teams, the ability to have face-to-face conversations with staff from our Roads or Water department has been a nice change. I know they appreciate being able to reach out and feel connected, when they normally wouldn't have those social interactions.

Erin: COVID has taught me that we can be much more flexible in the services that we offer to employees as well as external potential candidates. For example, we recently held a virtual information session for a position we are recruiting for. This session was attended by over 40+ interested candidates! In the past, these sessions were held in-person, which could limit the number of people who would be able to attend. This virtual session allowed those who had other commitments and who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend, learn about the position and connect with our hiring team!



WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST OMHRA MEMBERS

Kim Bellissimo, Human Resources Manager, Region of Waterloo

Kristie Cronin, County of Essex – Director, Human Resources

Blayne Croskery, Human Resources Coordinator - City of Elliot Lake

Kelly Gibson, HR Coordinator – Township of St. Clair

Diane Glebe, Manager, HR Projects, Town of Saugeen Shores

Stephanie Godby, Human Resources Manager – County of Elgin

Rashid Hasan, Manager of Human Resources – Township of Centre Wellington

Pat Kemp, Township of Alnwick / Haldimand – Chief Administrative Officer

Dave Landers, Chief Administrative Officer – City of Timmins

Molly Lehoux, Clinic Employee Engagement Coordinator – Regional Municipality of Halton

Shelby Martel, Human Resources Coordinator - Township of South Stormont

Jennifer Patton, Health & Safety / HR Advisor - Town of The Blue Mountains

Gabrielle Servais, Co-Ordinator of Human Resources - City of Greater Sudbury

Andrea Short, Manager of Human Resources - Town of Cobourg

Claudine Sierkowska, HR Assistant/Training Coordinator – City of Belleville

Janice Stubbs, Manager, Human Resources, Town of Saugeen Shores



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