2023

York Region Employer Survey on Hiring Practices

Workforce Planning BOARD OF YORK REGION

York Region 2023 Employer Survey

ABOUT THE WORKFORCE PLANNING BOARD OF YORK REGION

The Workforce Planning Board of York Region (WPBoard) is a not-for-profit community based organization established in 1999 by the Province of Ontario to identify local labour market issues in York Region and undertake projects or partnerships that would contribute to addressing local employment needs. WPBoard is one of 26 independent non-government organizations located across the Province of Ontario and funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. A volunteer Board of Directors comprised of business and labour members from across the region provides the governance for the Board.

Executive summary

The Workforce Planning Board of York Region administered an employer survey through February 2023. In total, 257 employers started the survey and there was an average of 192 responses per substantive question. The survey sample was generally representative of the profile of employers in York Region, except that the survey is over-represented among the larger employee size categories (one in every 50 firms with 100 or more employees participated in the survey). As well, the survey has a higher proportion of employers from the Manufacturing and Educational Services sectors, and a lower proportion of employers from Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, as well as from Retail Trade.

Slightly over half of employers reported that in the previous six months they had recruited for both entry-level occupations (57%) and mid-level occupations (53%), while around one-quarter (27%) indicated that they had recruited for senior-level occupations.

Six out of ten employers indicated they found it very challenging to recruit job candidates across each level of occupations, from entry-level, to mid-level to senior level occupations. Only a small proportion indicated that it was not at all challenging.

The challenge most frequently cited by employers for all three levels of occupation was that there simply were not enough job candidates.

For entry-level occupations, the next two challenges most often cited were:
- The job candidate did not appear job ready
- The job candidate lacked the necessary job-related skills

For both mid-level and senior-level occupations, the second and third most frequently cited challenges were:
- The job candidate lacked the desired experience qualifications
- The job candidate lacked the necessary job-related skills

There is a clear order of preferred recruitment strategies among employers. Three rank very highly:
- Posting jobs with on-line sites (e.g., Indeed, Workopolis, Job Bank etc.)
- Ensuring wages are competitive compared to similar employers in our area
- Seeking referrals from current employees or word-of-mouth

And two other strategies rank somewhat highly:
- Posting jobs on social media channels or company website
- Highlighting training and advancement opportunities within the firm

Two strategies rate quite low in terms of preference:
- Placing advertisements in traditional media (flyers/newspaper/radio ads)
- Offering a signing bonus

When employers were asked to list the most important soft skill for an entry-level occupation, by far the most important soft skill was communication skills, mentioned by a third (34%) of employers. A more distant second and third most important soft skill were "teamwork" (14%) and "willing to learn" (12%).

On the topic of retention strategies, employers indicated that there were several retention strategies they were already using before COVID hit, notably:
- Regular staff meetings and communication
- Onboarding and orientation
- Continuous feedback on performance
- Mentorship
- Training, development and advancement
- Respect work-life balance

Flexible policies for remote work were something which was taken up during and after COVID by at least one-fifth (22%) of employers, as were flexible work schedules (20%). Since COVID, employers indicated they were giving more thought to:
- Wellness offerings (30%)
- Explicit employee engagement program (24%)
- Expanding the benefits package (23%)
- Recognition and rewards program (22%) – although this strategy already had a large proportion (50%) of employers saying they already used this strategy since before COVID

With regards to remote work, on average employers somewhat agree with each of the following statements:
- When most of the work is being done from home, it is harder to onboard and train new employees
- It is up to employers to decide what amount of remote work they will accommodate and not employees deciding what their preference is
- When many employees are working from home, it is harder to instill and maintain a common corporate culture
- Employees on average seem to prefer a hybrid work arrangement, splitting their time between working from home and working in the workplace

Only a small percentage of employers (8%) had reduced their office space requirements as a consequence of COVID, but a slightly larger proportion (12%) are considering reducing their office space requirements. Employers in the Professional, Scientific & Technical Services were both considerably more likely to have already reduced their office space needs and were also more likely to be considering reducing their office space needs in the future. Also, the larger the firm, the more likely the company was considering reducing their office space needs in the future.

Introduction

Over the course of three weeks in February 2023 (February 6 to February 25), the Workforce Planning Board of York Region administered an employer survey. The main focus of the survey was regarding hiring practices, including identifying challenges which employers faced as well as preferred strategies for recruitment. The survey also probed employers about desirable soft skills, practices related to job retention and views regarding remote work. In total, 257 employers started the survey. The survey was "cleaned" to eliminate those entries which did not provide answers to substantive questions (that is, other than general information about the size and industry of the employer), leaving 221 respondents. While the number of responses to a survey tends to drop as one progresses through the survey questions, the average number of responses per substantive question was 192, which reflects a high response rate.

Profile of employers

There were two categories for classifying the employers, by industry and by size. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by industry and compares the figure to the actual distribution of employers in York Region. Those cells where the survey proportion is either considerably higher or considerably lower (either 3% or more higher or 3% or more lower) than the actual percentage distribution are shaded green (higher) or orange (lower). Overall, the proportion of respondents generally matched the distribution of York Region employers by industry. The most prominent differences are that the survey has a higher proportion of employers from the Manufacturing and Educational Services sectors, and a lower proportion of employers from Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, as well as from Retail Trade.

Table 1: Distribution of survey respondents by industry compared to actual distribution of establishments with employees in York Region

Industry sector	SURVEY #	SURVEY %	ACTUAL
Accommodation and Food Services	12	5.4%	5.9%
Administrative & Support	2	0.9%	4.7%
Agriculture	4	1.8%	0.4%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	10	4.5%	1.0%
Construction	26	11.8%	12.8%
Educational Services	21	9.5%	1.6%
Finance and Insurance	13	5.9%	4.1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	26	11.8%	9.5%
Information and Cultural Industries	1	0.5%	1.3%
Manufacturing	32	14.5%	5.0%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	15	6.8%	7.2%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	25	11.3%	19.7%
Public Administration	3	1.4%	0.0%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	5	2.3%	5.6%
Retail Trade	10	4.5%	9.7%
Transportation and Warehousing	8	3.6%	4.1%

Utilities	0	0.0%	0.0%
Wholesale Trade	8	3.6%	6.7%
TOTAL	**221**	100.0%	99.3%

The figure for actual number of employers by industry is derived from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, June 2022. The total percentage for the Actual establishments does not add up to 100% because two industries were not collected for the survey: Management of Companies (which make up 0.5% of employers) and Mining and Oil & Gas Extraction (0.1%). The 0.0% of firms in Public Administration in the Actual column represents the rounding off the 20 establishments in this category, as it represents 0.04% of all establishments with employees. NOTE: Table 2 does not include employers with no employees.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of all businesses with employees by number of employees. The survey is over-represented among the larger employee size categories; while firms with 100 or more employees make up 1.7% of all York region's employers, within the survey sample they make up 9.3%. Indeed, 2.2% of all firms with 100 or more employees participated in the survey (more than one in fifty). Firms with 1-4 employees make up 64.1% of all employers in York Region, but they made up a smaller 30.7% of the employers who participated in the survey. With over 35,000 employers in York Region having 1-4 employers, one of every 500 of them participated in the survey (0.2% of that category).

Table 2: Distribution of survey respondents by number of employees

	Number of employees			
	1-4	**5-19**	**20-99**	**100+**
Actual number in York Region				
Number	35,301	14,169	4,657	911
Percent	64.1%	25.7%	8.5%	1.7%
Survey respondents				
Number	66	84	45	20
Percent	30.7%	39.1%	20.9%	9.3%
Survey respondents as percent of actual number				
Percent	0.2%	0.6%	1.0%	2.2%

The figure for actual number of employers by number of employees is derived from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, June 2022

Incidence of hiring

A major part of the survey focused on the challenges employers faced when hiring, to what they attributed these challenges and what strategies they used to recruit new employees.

In exploring these topics, the survey distinguished between three levels of occupations, as follows:

Entry-level or low-skilled workers: Jobs usually requiring a high school diploma or less, such as cashiers, shelf stockers, retail salespersons, cleaners, production workers, labourers
Mid-level or mid-skilled workers: Jobs usually requiring a trades certificate or a post-secondary diploma/degree, such as skilled tradespersons, technicians, technologists, supervisors
Senior or high skill-skilled workers: Jobs usually requiring a post-secondary diploma/degree, such as managers, professionals (e.g., accountants, engineers, lawyers), nurses, teachers, etc.

The survey first asked whether employers had hired or had a job opening for any of these three levels of occupations in the previous six months. Chart 1 shows the responses by level of occupations.
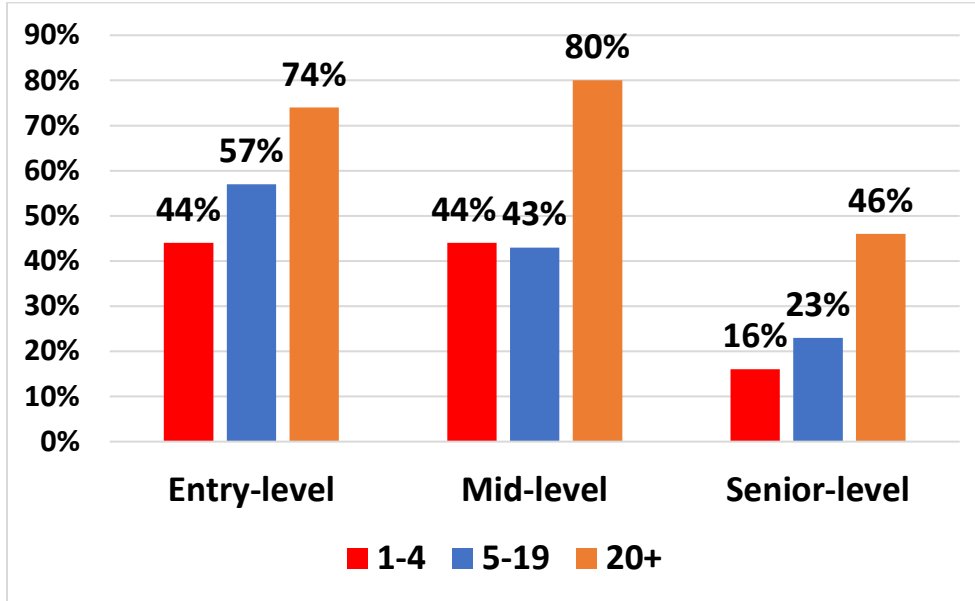
Chart 1: Incidence of hiring in the previous six months, all employers
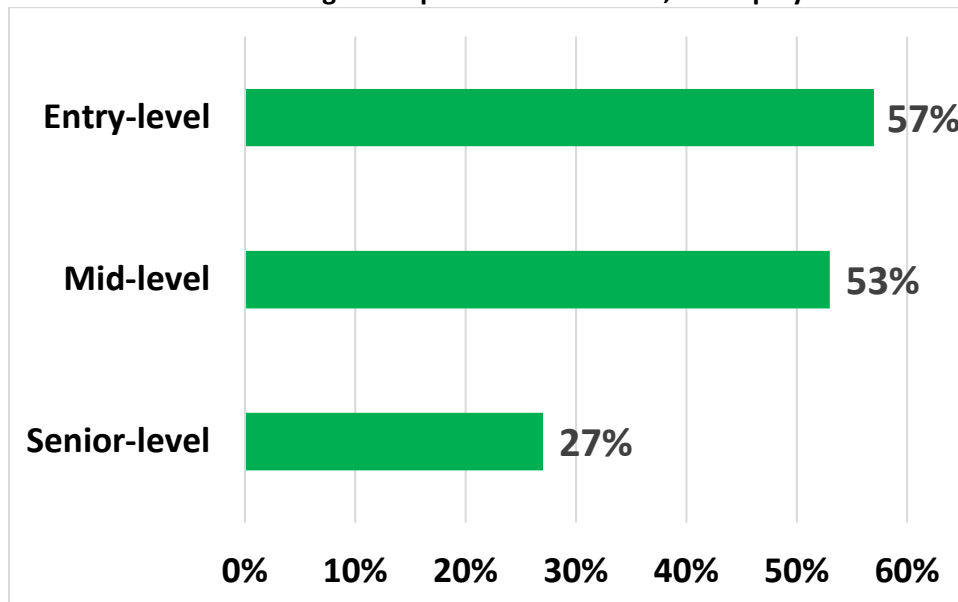
Level	Percentage
Entry-level	57%
Mid-level	53%
Senior-level	27%

Slightly over half of employers reported that in the previous six months they had recruited for both entry-level occupations (57%) and mid-level occupations (53%), while around one-quarter (27%) indicated that they had recruited for senior-level occupations.

Not surprisingly, the larger the firm the more likely it is that they have engaged in recruiting job candidates. Chart 2 illustrates the incidence of hiring by the size of the firm. There is only a slight difference in the level of hiring between firms with 1 to 4 employees and firms with 5 to 19 employees, but a considerable difference between these firms and those with 20 or more employees.
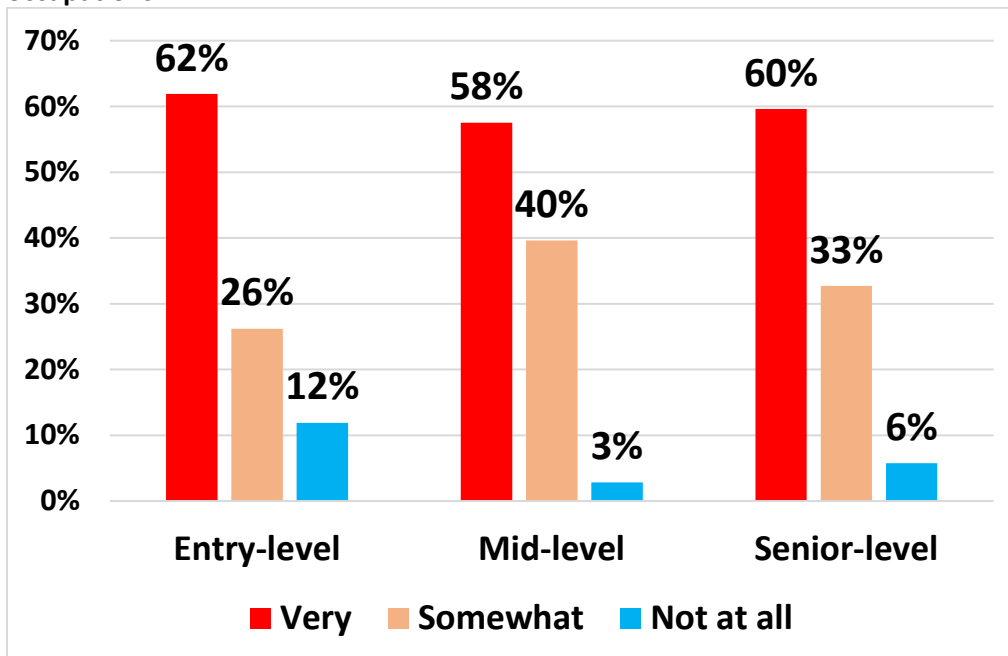
Chart 2: Incidence of hiring in the previous six months by number of employees

Entry-level:
- 1-4: 44%
- 5-19: 57%
- 20+: 74%

Mid-level:
- 1-4: 44%
- 5-19: 43%
- 20+: 80%

Senior-level:
- 1-4: 16%
- 5-19: 23%
- 20+: 46%

Legend: ■ 1-4 ■ 5-19 ■ 20+

Level of challenge when hiring

Employers who had been recruiting in the previous six months were asked to rate the level of challenge they faced when recruiting. Chart 3 illustrates the responses across the three levels of occupations.

Chart 3: Degree of challenge experienced by employers when recruiting for different levels of occupations

Entry-level:
- Very: 62%
- Somewhat: 26%
- Not at all: 12%

Mid-level:
- Very: 58%
- Somewhat: 40%
- Not at all: 3%

Senior-level:
- Very: 60%
- Somewhat: 33%
- Not at all: 6%

Legend: ■ Very ■ Somewhat ■ Not at all

Six out of ten employers indicated they found it very challenging to recruit job candidates across each level of occupations. A considerable proportion found it somewhat challenging, although this varied by level of occupation, with a particularly hire score for mid-level occupations. Notably, only a small proportion said it was not at all challenging: 12% said so in relation to hiring for entry-level occupations, 6% said the same for senior-level occupations and only 3% said it was not at all challenging to hire for mid-level occupations.

When these responses are compared by size of the firm, firms with 20 or more employees were slightly less likely to say that they found recruiting for job candidates to be very challenging. There was hardly any variation when these results were analyzed by industry, albeit in many instances, when dissected by industry and by level of occupations, the sample becomes too unreliable to draw any conclusions.

Frequency of specific challenges when hiring

Employers were further asked how frequently a specific challenge arose when recruiting. They were presented with a set of challenges and asked to indicate whether this occurred "very often," "sometimes" or "rarely or not at all." To compare results across different challenges and between levels of occupations, a composite score was created, as follows:

- 2 points were given for each "very often" response
- 1 point was given for each "sometimes" response
- A zero was given for each "rarely or not at all" response

These values were added up and then divided by the number of respondents who provided a score (that is, excluding those answered "don't know/not applicable"), in this way creating an average score for each challenge (Table 6). The three challenges that arose most frequently for each level have been shaded red, while the three challenges arising least often have been shaded green. The challenges presented to the employers differed slightly by level of occupations, and so some cells are shaded grey where that challenge was not an option for that level of occupations.

The challenge most frequently cited by employers for all three levels of occupation was that there simply were not enough job candidates.

For entry-level occupations, the next two challenges most often cited were:
- The job candidate did not appear job ready
- The job candidate lacked the necessary job-related skills

For both mid-level and senior-level occupations, the second and third most frequently cited challenges were that the job candidate:
- Lacked the desired experience qualifications
- Lacked the necessary job-related skills

It is worth noting that the challenge cited fourth for all levels of occupations was that the wage expectation was higher than what was being offered.

Table 3: Composite scores for frequency of challenges by level of occupations

	Entry-level	Mid-level	Senior level
Lack of job candidates	1.48	1.60	1.52
Lacked the educational qualifications we are looking for	0.88	1.29	1.17
Lacked the experience qualifications we are looking for	1.21	1.49	1.43
Lacked the job-related skills we are looking for	1.28	1.48	1.42
Job candidate does not appear job ready (does not show up for interviews; appears unmotivated)	1.43		
The job candidate was only testing their market value, not looking to change jobs		0.96	1.07
We made a job offer but the candidate declined, did not even show up or left our employment within a few days	1.18		
Wage expectations higher than what we are offering	1.26	1.38	1.36
Not the right fit for our organization	1.04	1.09	1.22
Did not have the language skills we require	0.69	0.73	0.63
The working arrangements were not suitable for the candidate (hours of work; shift work; evenings or weekend work; and so on)	0.93	0.82	0.70
Transportation or commuting difficulties could not be overcome	0.85	0.61	0.77
Job candidate accepted a job from a different employer	0.87	0.76	1.02
The job candidate did not possess the necessary leadership skills or the potential to develop them			0.91
Job candidate was seeking hybrid or remote work	0.71	0.68	0.89

In terms of challenges during the recruitment process which arose less frequently, there also was a considerable degree of overlap across the three levels of occupations. Table 4 itemizes these challenges, from the least to the second and third least challenging.

Table 4: Challenges which arose less frequently during the recruitment process by levels of occupations

Entry-level	Mid-level	Senior level
1. Did not have the language skills we require 2. Job candidate was seeking hybrid or remote work 3. Transportation or commuting difficulties could not be overcome	1. Transportation or commuting difficulties could not be overcome 2. Job candidate was seeking hybrid or remote work 3. Did not have the language skills we require	1. Did not have the language skills we require 2. The working arrangements were not suitable for the candidate 3. Transportation or commuting difficulties could not be overcome

There were some slight variations by different categories of employers in their responses to the challenges which arose more frequently. Employers with 1 to 4 employees were more likely to cite the lack of experience qualifications and the lack of job-related skills, while employers with 20 or more employees most often cited the issue that job candidates did not appear job-ready.

By industry, the most frequent challenge which arose varied:
- Construction: Lacked the experience qualifications
- Job candidate did not appear job-ready
- Manufacturing: Lack of job candidates
- Services (Accommodation & Food Services; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; Retail Trade): Lack of job candidates

Strategies for recruiting job candidates

Employers were next asked which strategies they used to recruit job candidates. Once again, this question was asked in relation to the three levels of occupations. Employers were given a range of strategies and were asked to indicate for each one their level of importance, as follows: "very important," "somewhat important" or "not likely to use."

To compare results across different strategies and between levels of occupations, a composite score was created, as follows:

- 2 points were given for each "very important" response
- 1 point was given for each "somewhat important" response
- A zero was given for each "not likely to use" response

These values were added up and then divided by the number of respondents who provided a score (that is, excluding those answered "don't know/not applicable"), in this way creating an average score for each strategy (Table 5).

There is a clear order of preferred recruitment strategies among employers. Three rank very highly:

- Posting jobs with on-line sites (e.g., Indeed, Workopolis, Job Bank etc.)
- Ensuring wages are competitive compared to similar employers in our area
- Seeking referrals from current employees or word-of-mouth

And two other strategies rank somewhat highly:
- Posting jobs on social media channels or company website
- Highlighting training and advancement opportunities within the firm

Table 5: Composite scores for strategies for recruiting job candidates by level of occupations

	Entry-level	Mid-level	Senior-level	AVG
Posting jobs with on-line sites (e.g., Indeed, Workopolis, Job Bank etc.)	1.71	1.72	1.70	1.71
Ensuring wages are competitive compared to similar employers in our area	1.53	1.62	1.52	1.56
Seeking referrals from current employees or word-of-mouth	1.45	1.50	1.58	1.51
Posting jobs on social media channels or company website	1.23	1.27	1.42	1.31
Highlighting training and advancement opportunities within our firm	1.18	1.33	1.36	1.29
Making an effort to diversify our workforce (e.g., recruit youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, and so on)	1.14	1.06	0.98	1.06
Obtaining services through fee for service recruitment agencies	0.63	0.78	0.98	0.80
Offering employees flexibility to work remotely from home	0.38	0.68	1.02	0.69
Recruiting international students	0.68	0.61	0.56	0.62
Utilizing no-cost community employment services (e.g., Employment Ontario or settlement services)	0.72	0.58	0.45	0.58
Sourcing talent from a competitor company		0.52	0.64	0.58
Offering a signing bonus	0.25	0.39	0.48	0.37
Placing advertisements in traditional media (flyers/newspaper/radio ads)	0.31	0.36	0.33	0.33

Two strategies rate quite low in terms of preference:
- Placing advertisements in traditional media (flyers/newspaper/radio ads)
- Offering a signing bonus

And four other strategies are also relied on less frequently:
- Sourcing talent from a competitor company
- Utilizing no-cost community employment services (e.g., Employment Ontario or settlement services)
- Recruiting international students
- Offering employees flexibility to work remotely from home

Many strategies are also applied differently depending on the level of occupations being recruited for, as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Reliance on recruitment strategies dependent on level of occupations

Strategies that are used LESS frequently as the skill level of the occupation increases	Strategies that are used MORE frequently as the skill level of the occupation increases
• Making an effort to diversify our workforce (e.g., recruit youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, and so on) • Recruiting international students • Utilizing no-cost community employment services (e.g., Employment Ontario or settlement services)	• Seeking referrals from current employees or word-of-mouth • Posting jobs on social media channels or company website • Highlighting training and advancement opportunities within our firm • Obtaining services through fee for service recruitment agencies • Offering employees flexibility to work remotely from home • Sourcing talent from a competitor company • Offering a signing bonus

While there are slight variations by size of establishment and by industry, the differences are not so significant.

Most important soft skill for entry-level occupations

Employers were asked to identify the soft skill which they felt was most important when evaluating job candidates for entry-level occupations. Respondents were not provided with a list but instead were asked to express the skill, preferably in one or two words. In compiling the results, we gathered responses which expressed the same thing. For example, we used the heading "Communication skills" to represent "Effective communications," "strong communication skills" and "communications – verbal and written." In total, 178 employers responded to this question and, in many instances, they did not limit themselves to just one soft skill; indeed, in total, there were 278 entries. Close to 40 different skills were identified, although one could probably cluster them into a more succinct set of categories. Nonetheless, certain soft skills were cited much more often than others. Table 7 lists the seven soft skills most frequently mentioned. The number refers to how many times the skill was cited, and the percentage is the proportion of employers (that is, of 178 employers) who mentioned that skill.

Table 7: Seven most frequently mentioned soft skills important for entry-level occupations

Soft skill	Number	Percent
Communication skills	61	34%
Teamwork	25	14%
Willing to learn	22	12%
Friendly, personable	16	9%
Reliable/dependable	14	8%
Customer service	13	7%
Interpersonal skills	11	6%

By far, the most frequently mentioned desirable soft skill is "communication skills," mentioned by 34% of the employers who responded. A more distant second and third were "teamwork" (14%) and "willing to learn" (12%).

Employers did not need a definition of what a soft skill is. Almost all the entries represented a soft skill, except for 12 entries, which mentioned such hard skills as knowledge of Microsoft Office or the need to have a high school diploma.

Job retention strategies

Employers were presented with a list of job retention strategies and were asked if they already used them or would consider using them. The options for each strategy were as follows:
- Were using before COVID
- Started using during COVID or since
- We are thinking about using
- We would not use this strategy

Fifteen retention strategies were presented and, to make the presentation more legible, they have been divided into two clusters; Chart 4 represents strategies that many employers were already using before COVID and Chart 5 represents those strategies that attracted the highest proportion of employers who said they would not use that strategy. The charts are followed by tables which list the actual percentages for each response.

There are a set of retention strategies which a large proportion of employers claim they have been using since before COVID. Around two-thirds of employers or more make this assertion in relation to the following strategies:
- Regular staff meetings and communication
- Onboarding and orientation
- Continuous feedback on performance
- Mentorship
- Training, development and advancement
- Respect work-life balance

Two other strategies were relied on somewhat less:

- 53% said they had increased wages before COVID as a retention strategy, but a considerable 27% said they have relied on this during or since COVID
- 53% said that had used teambuilding activities as a retention strategy, but 23% said they were thinking of it now

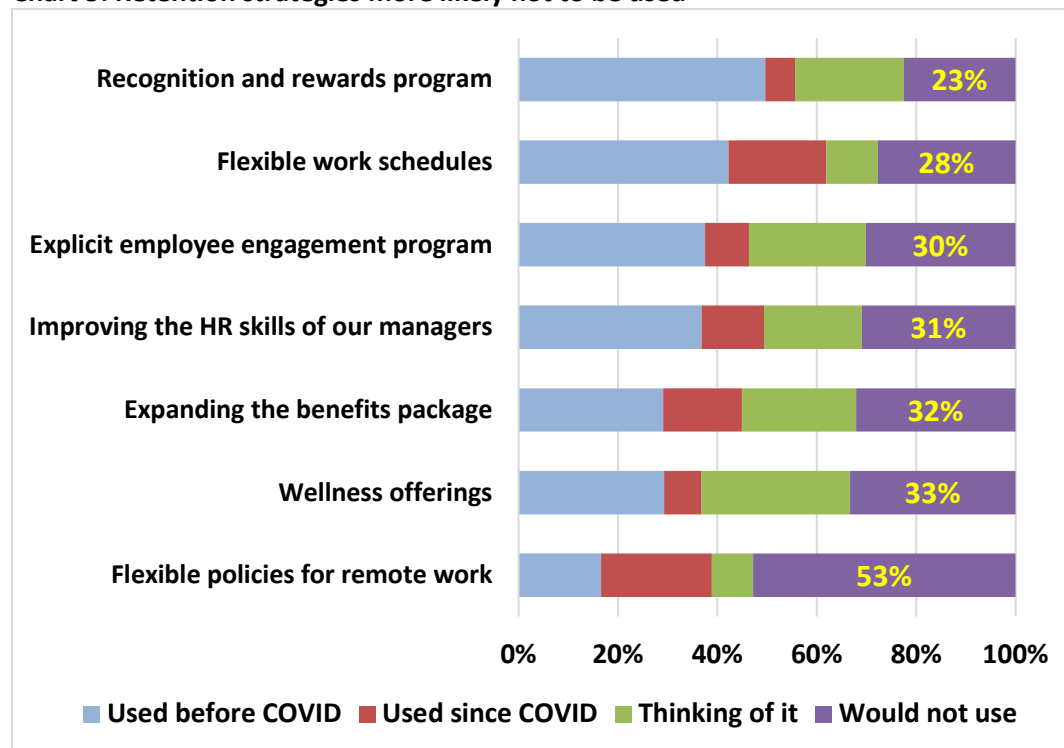**Chart 4: Retention strategies most commonly used before COVID**
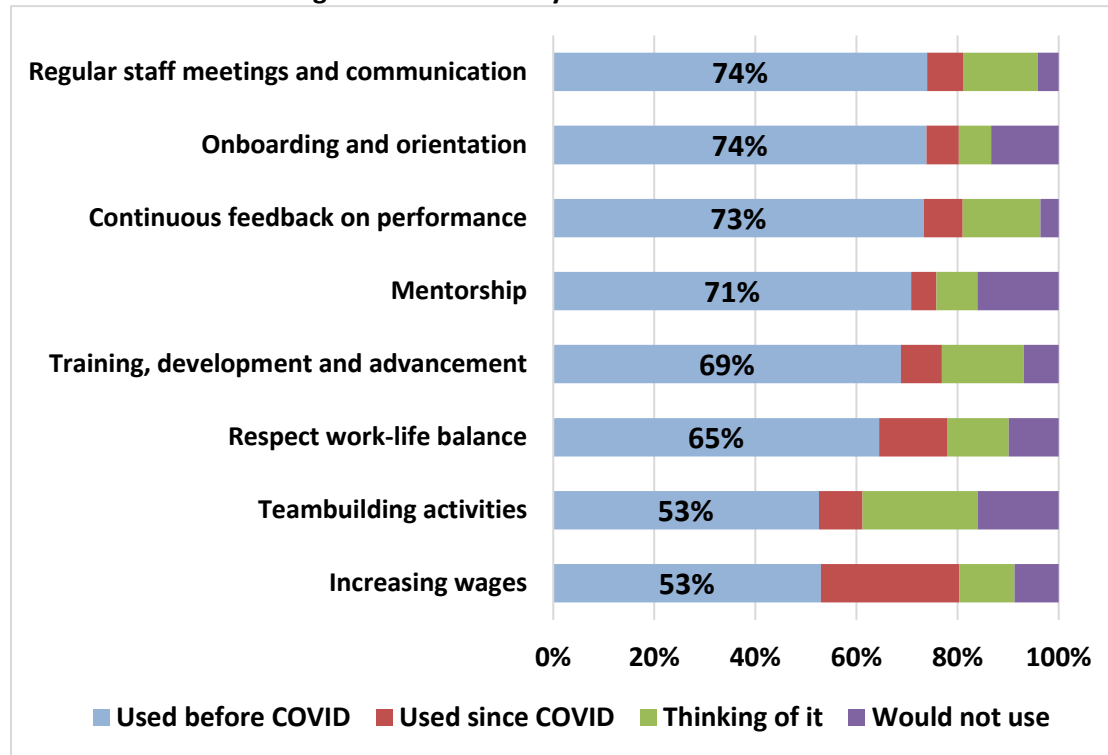
Table 8: Retention strategies most commonly used before COVID

	Used before COVID	Used during/since COVID	Thinking of it	Would not use
Regular staff meetings/ communication	74%	7%	15%	4%
Onboarding and orientation	74%	6%	6%	13%
Continuous feedback on performance	73%	8%	15%	4%
Mentorship	71%	5%	8%	16%
Training, development and advancement	69%	8%	16%	7%
Respect work-life balance	65%	13%	12%	10%
Teambuilding activities	53%	9%	23%	16%
Increasing wages	53%	27%	11%	9%

Another category of retention strategies attracts higher levels of employers who say they would not use them, typically from almost one quarter (23%) to one third (33%), although one strategy, flexible policies for remote work, is not on the cards for over half (53%) or employers.

Chart 5: Retention strategies more likely not to be used

Legend: Used before COVID | Used since COVID | Thinking of it | Would not use

Table 9: Retention strategies more likely not to be used

	Used before COVID	Used during/since COVID	Thinking of it	Would not use
Recognition and rewards program	50%	6%	22%	23%
Flexible work schedules	42%	20%	10%	28%
Explicit employee engagement program	38%	9%	24%	30%
Improving the HR skills of our managers	37%	13%	20%	31%
Expanding the benefits package	29%	16%	23%	32%
Wellness offerings	29%	8%	30%	33%
Flexible policies for remote work	17%	22%	8%	53%

Flexible policies for remote work were something which was taken up during and after COVID by at least one-fifth (22%) of employers, as were flexible work schedules (20%). Several of the strategies listed did cause a share of employers to say they were giving thought to that strategy:

- Wellness offerings (30%)
- Explicit employee engagement program (24%)
- Expanding the benefits package (23%)
- Recognition and rewards program (22%) – although this strategy already had a large proportion (50%) of employers saying they already used this strategy since before COVID

Opinions about remote work

Employers were presented with a set of statements regarding remote work and were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. The statements are as they were expressed in the survey are listed below, together with their abbreviated versions which are used in presenting the results.

DESCRIPTION IN SURVEY	ABBREVIATION
The experience with COVID showed that employees could be just as productive working from home as they had been in the workplace	Employees as productive
When many employees are working from home, it is harder to instill and maintain a common corporate culture	Harder for culture
When most of the work is being done from home, it is harder to onboard and train new employees	Harder to onboard
Employees on average seem to prefer a hybrid work arrangement, splitting their time between working from home and working in the workplace	Workers prefer hybrid
It is up to employers to decide what amount of remote work they will accommodate and not employees deciding what their preference is	Employers decide
Hybrid work has become the new normal and employers need to make it part of their business model	Hybrid is new normal

Employers were provided with optional responses and a composite score was developing based on the following values for each response:

|	
Very much agree	= +2
Somewhat agree	= +1
Neither agree nor disagree	= 0
Somewhat disagree	= -1
Very much disagree	= -2

Chart 6 shows the average cumulative responses for each statement. There are four statements which attract moderate support:
- When most of the work is being done from home, it is harder to onboard and train new employees
- It is up to employers to decide what amount of remote work they will accommodate and not employees deciding what their preference is
- When many employees are working from home, it is harder to instill and maintain a common corporate culture

- Employees on average seem to prefer a hybrid work arrangement, splitting their time between working from home and working in the workplace

None of the statements elicit an overall composite score which would indicate disagreement, however the proposition that COVID showed that employees could be just as productive working from home as they had been in the workplace more or less resulted in a draw, with the average score indicating that employers neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Chart 6: Composite score regarding remote work
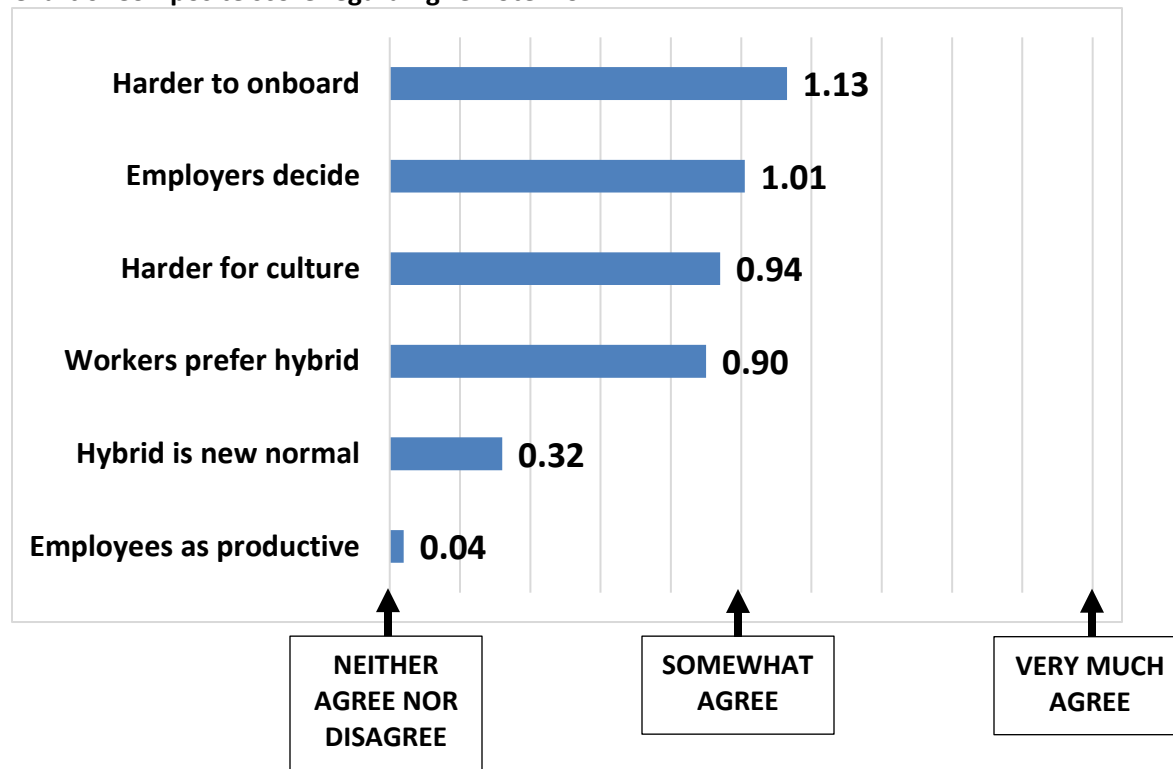
It is useful to examine the distribution of responses for each of these statements (Table 10). For those four statements which had higher composite scores, there was only a small percentage of employers who either somewhat disagreed or very much disagreed, hovering around 10%. Where there was a larger minority of employers expressing disagreement, it was in relation to whether hybrid work was the new normal (one quarter disagreed, including 15% who very much disagreed) and whether employees were as productive working remotely (one-third disagreed, including 22% who very much disagreed). In both instances, a larger proportion of employers, over 40%, agreed with these statements.

While there was little variations across the different segments of employers, one pattern was apparent: employers in the Services sector (Accommodation & Food Services; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; Retail Trade) were more likely to disagree with the statements that hybrid work was the new normal or that employees were as productive working remotely. On the other hand, employers in the Health Care & Social Assistance were more likely to agree with both of these statements.

Table 10: Percentage distribution of responses regarding remote work

	Very much agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Very much disagree
Harder to onboard	40%	24%	10%	5%	3%
Employers decide	40%	20%	11%	4%	7%
Harder for culture	35%	26%	10%	5%	7%
Workers prefer hybrid	29%	21%	18%	5%	3%
Hybrid is new normal	23%	21%	14%	10%	15%
Employees as productive	18%	22%	11%	11%	22%

Reliance on remote work and the need for office space

One final question probed employers regarding how any shift to remote work was having an impact on their need for office space. Employers were presented with two statements and were asked whether they agreed, disagreed or if the statement was not applicable to them. The two statements were:

- Since COVID, we have already reduced the square footage accommodating our office workers
- In our future planning, we are considering reducing the square footage accommodating our office workers

The percentage distribution of responses for each question are presented in the tables below, including by the different categories of employers. The number of respondents who answered each question is also displayed, so that one may have a sense of the sample sizes involved.

Table 11: Reduction of office space needs due to COVID

"Since COVID, we have already reduced the square footage accommodating our office workers"				
	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
ALL	8%	46%	46%	177
1-4 employees	8%	44%	48%	50
5-19 employees	8%	42%	49%	73
20+ employees	8%	55%	37%	51
Construction	5%	48%	48%	21
Health Care & Social Assistance	5%	18%	77%	22
Manufacturing	4%	67%	30%	27
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	23%	55%	23%	22
Services (Accommodation & Food Services; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; Retail Trade)	0%	26%	74%	23

Overall, 8% of respondents indicated that they had already reduced their office space requirements as a result of COVID (Table 11). One sector stands out as an outlier; firms in the Professional, Scientific & Technical Services sector were also three times as likely to have reduced their office space as the average, with 23% saying they had already done so.

Table 12: Considering reducing office space needs

"In our future planning, we are considering reducing the square footage accommodating our office workers"				
	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
ALL	12%	46%	42%	177
1-4 employees	6%	48%	46%	50
5-19 employees	12%	42%	45%	73
20+ employees	18%	49%	33%	51
Construction	0%	62%	38%	21
Health Care & Social Assistance	9%	23%	68%	22
Manufacturing	11%	67%	22%	27
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	23%	55%	23%	22
Services (Accommodation & Food Services; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; Retail Trade)	4%	30%	65%	23

There is a slightly higher proportion of employers who are considering reducing their office space requirements compared to those who have already done so (12% versus 8%) (Table 12). It is apparent that the larger the firm, the more likely they are rethinking their office space needs: among firms with 1-4 employees, 6% said they were considering it, which rose to 12% among firms with 5-19 employees and to 18% among firms with 20 or more employees. By industry sector, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services stands out once more, with 23% saying they were considering reducing their office space needs.

Conclusion

The survey finds that most employers are experiencing great challenges in finding job candidates across all levels of occupations. In addition to the shortage of candidates, employers felt some candidates were not job-ready, or did not have the requisite job skills or work experience. There is a high level of agreement regarding preferred job recruitment strategies, notably making use of on-line job boards, ensuring wages are competitive and relying on referrals and word-of-mouth.

Employers have already practiced various types of job retention strategies, which have evolved as a consequence of the COVID experience.

Employers feel remote work makes onboarding new employees more challenging, as well as making it harder to maintain a corporate culture. While employers recognize that employees may prefer hybrid work, they make clear it is up to them to determine what level of remote work is appropriate.