

The Emerging Grey Collar Workforce

Not quite blue, not quite white: Here's why they matter to the Canadian Economy

TORONTO, Jan. 22, 2020 – As automation creeps into our everyday lives, everything from grocery delivery to one-day shipping for online shopping, workers face a new decade of increased reliance on technologies designed to make businesses more efficient than ever before. While some jobs may become obsolete, this new trend will also create career opportunities in what we now refer to as the grey collar workforce.



Express Employment Professionals released a [white paper](#) today that explores this area between blue and white collar.

In its polling and public opinion research, Express, working with The Harris Poll, uses the term “grey collar” to describe work that combines some of the manual labour aspects of blue collar work but also has components of white collar work. Several of the included professions require skilled workers with specialized training beyond a high school diploma, such as engineers, paralegals, airline pilots, firefighters, non-physician healthcare professionals and more.

Jessica Culo, an Express franchise owner from Edmonton, believes that the need for grey collar workers will only increase. “I think we are going to continue to see an applicant short market, specifically for grey collar job candidates,” she said. “Typically, organizations not only need the specific skills for these roles, but also certain 'soft skills' that make them harder to fill. And the skills which are not as easily replaced by new technologies like machine learning and AI will come to the forefront in terms of importance.”

“After previously surveying the traditional blue and white collar populations, it became apparent that technology is changing businesses in such a way that more research was needed on this emerging population of workers,” said Bill Stoller, CEO of Express.

In fact, the top workplace trend for 2019, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, was “fostering the relationship between robotics and artificial intelligence.” From manufacturing to farming, administration to education, industries are incorporating advanced technologies into their

processes.

Future Demand

More than 66% of the surveyed grey collar workers hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and 79% of those said going to university or college was worth every penny.

Shane DeCoste, an Express franchise owner from Nova Scotia, is seeing the impact technological change is having on jobs that used to be described as blue collar. "Jobs that were once 100% manual are now incorporating elements of technology for efficiency and information tracking," he said.

"Job seekers have to be willing to learn to use company software programs, scanning guns, tablets and other electronic tools in roles where they never had to previously. On skill level, we're seeing a higher expectation for entry level roles."

Companies long known for blue collar work will find themselves more reliant on grey collar workers. Forty percent of grey collar workers expect substantial job growth in their fields over the coming years, according to the Express survey.

The new white paper also explores more about grey collar workers, including:

- Who they are
- Where they work
- What they do
- Satisfaction with lives and jobs
- Direction of their lives
- Ability of their job to provide a good living
- Future optimism

Archaic Labels

Most white collar (83%) and grey collar workers (81%) view labels such as "grey collar," "white collar" and "blue collar" as a good way to describe the work they do, but also see these labels as old-fashioned and not necessarily applicable anymore (grey collar, 62%; white collar, 56%).

Jessica Culo is cautious about relying on terms grey, white and blue collar. "I think there is a danger that these terms can create stereotypes and stigmas which may not be appreciated by everybody," she says. "We just need to be careful when we use them. For instance, the term white collar is associated with professional and educated employment. Many teachers or engineers would consider that label appropriate for their line of work."

So, while examining the views of grey collar workers and working the term into our workplace lexicon can help form a clearer picture of the modern and future workforce, they do not paint the full picture.

"In the modern workforce, businesses and employees must be willing to change and adapt to new technology, regardless of collar classification," said Bill Stoller, CEO of Express. "Instead of panicking about how artificial intelligence will eliminate positions, we need to embrace these emerging grey collar roles and the opportunities they create."

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Adria Minsky at (416) 620-7111 or email adria@mapleleafstrategies.com.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the international staffing company has more than 800 franchises in the U.S., Canada and South Africa. Since its inception, Express has put more than 7.7 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, OK, our international network of franchises offer localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve, employing 552,000 people across North America in 2019. For more information, visit www.ExpressPros.com.