



IPSOS CONVERSATIONS: Pandemic Lessons and Reflections

Sentiment around the height of summer in 2020 was cautiously optimistic amongst Ipsos Conversations community members – there was hope of a vaccine, businesses getting back on their feet, families reuniting and overall expectations of some semblance of a ‘Normal Life’ was on the horizon. However, having lived through another 8 months of no significant positive change, members appear to be somewhat deflated right now.

PANDEMIC LIFE LESSONS: The Good

Gratitude and resilience. Members are thankful that they have overcome a testing year. Where applicable, there’s an immense sense of gratitude for their health, government relief programs, flexible working arrangements and technology that has kept members afloat.

The time at home has been valuable in more than one way. Members have rewarding ways to spend their time at home: quality family time, being able to focus on self (meditation, reading, pursuing hobbies), finally getting around projects they’ve put off for years and discovering home as a space of multiple possibilities (exercise, work, creative outlet). Some introverts admit to thriving during these times.

Embracing simplicity. There is joy in learning that they can live with a lot less than they previously thought. There is less FOMO and some report less attachment to material goods. This in turn has resulted in the added benefits of more time for self and money in the bank.



Another thing that has changed is that I have now focused more of my energy on things that I enjoy doing, as opposed to things that I am expected to enjoy. I have renewed my interest in hobbies that I haven't done for a year. I have tackled projects around the house that have been put off for too long. And because I haven't been able to go anywhere, I have paid off all of my consumer debt and have started saving for larger renovation projects, travel and retirement.”

PANDEMIC LIFE LESSONS: The Bad

Remote permanently. While working from home was fun initially and continues to have its perks, members miss their workplaces, working alongside and socializing with their colleagues. The promise of a better work-life balance with flexible working has not always materialized.



My work-life balance has been affected since. I find that I am now working longer hours than I did while in-person at the office as there is no commute. I also found that I'm taking less breaks throughout the day, causing back and neck pains, and eye strain. It's really taken a toll on my life as I would typically enjoy going to work to interact and socialize with my coworkers during lunch/breaks, but I find that those sorts of "breaks" now need to be scheduled in people's calendars.”

Promises made, promises not kept. There is growing discontent around governments' handling of the pandemic, exacerbated by the fact that Canada fared much better than the USA and most parts of the world earlier in the pandemic. The sluggish start of the vaccination program and lack of preparations to manufacture vaccines in Canada are the main sources of this disappointment.

Maskers vs. anti-maskers. The divide between those who are all in on public health measures vs. those who are taking it more causally seems to be getting wider. The former are saddened that some of their fellow Canadians are not sharing the load. Educators feel doubly pressurized in this scenario as they're not only responsible for their own health but also for students whose parents may not have taken the necessary precautions. Other essential workers report customers with "shorter fuses" and "lashing out" against masking requirements. Further, the sense of 'we are all in this together' has given way to "division and judgement".

PANDEMIC LIFE LESSONS:

The Ugly

Missing the human touch. Physical detachment from loved ones has been the hardest part for many members. They have missed many happy occasions (babies yet to be introduced to family and friends, weddings, any form of celebration), but what's been worse is the incapability to support their dear ones through some of the toughest times (not being able to meet ailing parents, missing last rites or funerals). "Zoom fatigue" has long set in for many.



We've all lost friends, family or relatives during this time, some to Covid-19 but many just as a part of life and it's been tough to say good bye without being able to see the families of those who lost loved ones. To share in the loss, the sorrow and the opportunity to comfort one another just by 'being there'."

Life on pause and life overhauled. For some of our youngest community members, hopes to get their further education and careers started, along with aspirations to join the property market feel on hold. In contrast, those in the sandwich generation are finding themselves in precarious situations having lost their long tenured jobs.



I lost my job as a Director and at almost 60 years of age, I can't seem to find another. In the few interviews I've been granted, I can see the look on the (much younger) interviewers faces when I walk in and sense that they are 'being polite' by completing the interview but have no intention of bringing me into their team. EI has run out and my savings are depleted. I'm living on my line of credit and am terrified that I will financially bury myself so deep that I will never recover at my age."

Toll on mental health. Members across the board are open about the stress, anxiety and depression they have experiencing as a result of the multi-faceted pressures of the pandemic.



Having lived through a year of Pandemic, there is acceptance of the fact that the situation will not change overnight. Most members do not expect a return to pre-Covid normalcy anytime soon. Still, there is hope that the worst is behind us. A successful vaccination campaign is pivotal for members to start believing in the possibility of a Covid-Free or Post-Covid world.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE:

Hopes

Measured Social Normalcy. Members recognize that some protocols will remain necessary but are very much looking forward to at least sharing a physical space with their loved ones. They recognize the importance of restoring life back to 'normal' as much as possible for their own, and their children's, wellbeing. Many are holding out on travel still, even though they can't wait for this to resume.

Holding onto the Covid lessons. There is acknowledgement that Covid has helped members discover some positive aspects about themselves and community: kindness towards others, more responsibility towards local communities and the environment, more appreciation for what they have and more focus on savings and health. They want to hold onto these lessons even when things get back to normal. Perhaps, these items would define their 'New Normal'.

A mask-free world eventually? The end of Covid-19 in the truest sense would be when finally, everyone can be in the physical presence of each other without having to wear a mask. However, this is more of a long-term wish (2022/23 perhaps) though some wonder whether masks are here to stay.



I think the biggest change in the next 12 months will be that once people are vaccinated, we will be able to slowly return to social interactions, seeing our friends and visiting our families. However, I think we are still going to be very cautious with travel plans and do not anticipate us making any trips too far from home in the next 12 months. We have discussed that even when we go to Vancouver to visit our families, we are still going to be cautious and somewhat limit interactions outside of those extended family 'bubbles' as much as possible until we feel fully comfortable doing so."

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE:

Fears

The fear of losing it all again. Excitement at the easing of measures is accompanied with concern that without mass vaccination, cases may spike and thus slow down the overall recovery process. Memories of last fall's reintroduction of lockdowns are still fresh in members' minds.

Economic uncertainty. While things appear to be moving in a positive direction, the general belief is that economic conditions are far from favourable. There is looming worry about their personal finances as well as the continual survival of their own and local small businesses.

Gearing for the mental health fall out. Members worry that most of us are at the brink of emotional despair and breakdown. The younger generation comes to mind in particular, as do health care workers and essential workers who have worked tirelessly. There are calls to start planning for the post-pandemic mental health crisis.

Is this an endemic? Mutations of the virus is an area of concern with some wondering whether the virus will be akin to the season flu in the future. Thus, it becomes a part of life moving forward that we need to learn to live with.



My worry is it keeps mutating due to anti-maskers anti-vaxxers. It becomes an endemic that we chase with vaccines but breaks out again and again. If that happens it will eventually become a more lethal variant and we will be in so much worse trouble."

About Ipsos Conversations

Findings in this note are based on questions posted between March 11-12, 2021 on the Ipsos Conversations Community. The Community comprises 500 Canadians from all walks of life. It is an omnibus Community designed to provide clients with a vehicle for obtaining nimble cost-effective qualitative insights.

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