

PMETs more likely to find meaning and purpose in work compared to other workers IPS

A fair wage, workplace ethics and work conditions are the three most important aspects of a job for Singaporean workers. Younger workers also value growth and learning more than their older counterparts, the survey by NUS' Institute of Policy Studies showed.

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SINGAPORE: Professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMET) are significantly more likely to find meaning and purpose in their work compared to clerical or service workers and cleaners and labourers, a survey showed.

The National University of Singapore's (NUS) Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) surveyed 1,010 Singaporeans in the workforce aged 21 to 84 in October 2022.

More than six in 10 PMETs agreed that it is true or very true that they have found a meaningful career, and that their work makes a positive difference in the world, the study's findings showed on Monday (Jan 16).

For clerical, sales and service workers, 42 per cent said that it was true or very true that they found a meaningful career, and 46 per cent agreed that their work makes a positive difference.

The corresponding numbers for production and transport operators, cleaners and labourers are 43 per cent and 55 per cent respectively.

"MEANINGFUL WORK HELPS YOU TO BE MOTIVATED"

"We feel that it's important to highlight this because there's a lot of talk about helping people to find a fulfilling career. And that's important because when you find meaningful work and you find fulfillment, it helps you to be motivated to pursue your job further, improve yourself in your career ... and also to stay longer in the job as well," said senior research fellow Dr Laurel Teo.

"Conversely, if you find that your work is boring, it's not meaningful, (you're) not contributing to anything, you will not be able to find much satisfaction in your work. It's demotivating and that also has consequences on your personal outlook as well."

Stressing that the difference in results between PMETs and other occupations is significant, senior research fellow Dr Chew Han Ei noted that the results are a reflection of society and the changes that it wants.

Dr Chew noted Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's previous comments about Singaporeans valuing "brain work" more than "heart and hands work".

He continued: "This is that point in the findings, where we don't really value the 'hand and heart work'. Sometimes, it reflects in the opinions of the workers in these professions because their work is not valued by society as much, so it may seem like their careers are not as meaningful."

Being paid fairly, workplace ethics and work conditions are the top three most important aspects of a job, the survey also showed.

Younger Singaporeans between the age of 21 and 34 value growth and learning, as well as career advancement far more than those aged 35 to 54 and those aged 55 and above, said the researchers.

Job security, however, ranked low for younger respondents, compared to older respondents.

15 ASPECTS OF WORK WERE RANKED

Survey respondents were asked to rank 15 aspects of work in order of importance - achievement, career achievement, growth and learning, job autonomy, job security, leisure, being paid fairly, recognition, skill variety, social interaction, the significance of their work, the variety of their tasks, work conditions, workplace diversity and workplace ethics.

Responding to a question about the importance of career advancement as shown in the results, Dr Teo said: "It could be an area of concern because given how our retirement age is probably set to go up."

For example, a 54-year-old worker could still work for more than 10 more years, she noted.

"And if you feel that you have already reached your peak in your 40s, there could be some concerns."

While general diversity at the workplace ranked low in the overall ranking, respondents agreed that people with mental health conditions and people with disabilities are the two most important categories to include in the workplace.

The other categories were age, social class or income, race, gender, sexual orientation and religion.

WORKPLACE CHANGES

The survey also measured the preparedness of respondents when dealing with change at the workplace. It covered how aware they are about impending changes to their work, how open they are to the changes, and their anxiety about the changes or working in a different job.

Older workers are less likely to be aware of and open to workplace changes, the researchers said.

63 per cent of respondents aged 55 and above agreed or strongly agreed that they would be open to changes at work, compared to 77 per cent of those aged 35 to 54 and 83 per cent of those aged 21 to 34.

Less than half of those aged 55 and above were open to changing their occupations, compared to 63 per cent for those aged 35 to 54 and 69 per cent of those aged 21 to 34.

However, there were no significant differences in terms of anxiety about changes at work among different age groups, researchers said.

Another portion of the survey polled respondents on how they manage their own careers, as well as their beliefs in their ability to perform tasks at work in a creative way.

CHILDHOOD SES A SIGNIFICANT PREDICTOR

Gender, education level and childhood socio-economic status (SES) emerged as significant predictors, researchers said.

About 66 per cent of female respondents agreed that they have confidence in their abilities to solve problems creatively at work, compared to 79 per cent of male respondents.

“They (women) are socialised to be more conciliatory, so they tend to seek consensus among their group, and they tend to not want to appear to be too aggressive ... These are somewhat very different from the traits that might be needed to be creative,” Dr Teo added, citing sociological and psychological studies.

“So it does not mean that women are less creative at work. These results do not in any way point to actual ability, but it points to interest and it points to self-efficacy.”

More than half of those or 54 per cent of respondents who indicated that they grew up in upper social class brackets reported that they sought career-related training or development outside their organisations.

This was at least 12 per cent higher compared to those who grew up in the middle or lower social class brackets, the survey showed.

“The effects of childhood social SES remain statistically significant even after controlling for existing income levels and education attainment,” said researchers.