

## **Singaporean employees want flexible work and WFH arrangements as the norm for today's workplace**

**If they are required to return to the office when their preference is for greater work flexibility, they will be more inclined to find a new job, says an IPS report surveying 2,000 Singaporeans and PRs.**

**Lester Tan**

***Human Resources Online*, 27 April 2022**

Singaporeans' preferred work arrangements have shifted considerably throughout the course of the pandemic, according to one Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) report that involved 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents (PRs). It was discovered that, from July 2021 to April 2022, a number of employees surveyed (in the range of 41% and 52%) felt that flexible work arrangements (FWA) should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore. Meanwhile, in the same period, approximately 20% to 35% felt that working-from-home (WFH) on most days should be the new norm for workplaces.

With regard to the preferred number of working days a week for such work arrangements, overall, it was discovered that:

- About four in 10 (37% to 43%) felt that they should be allowed to WFH three days a week;
- Between 34% to 37% felt that they should be allowed to WFH home one to two days a week, and
- Around 24% to 26% felt that they should be allowed to work from home four to five days a week.

### **Employees with dependents - FWA, WFH, or WFO?**

Looking at specific demographics, among employees with children at home, more than four in 10 (44%) felt that FWA should be the new norm for workplaces, and approximately 28% preferred WFH on most days. Employees with aged persons at home, on the other hand, were found to be more connected (52%) with FWA as the new norm for workplaces in Singapore than those with children at home - and even more than those with both children and aged persons at home. Report analysts suggest that this is because they may prefer the flexibility to arrange their work schedule around caregiving needs of the aged persons.

Interestingly, close to four in 10 (38%) employees with both children and aged persons at home prefer working-from-office (WFO) on most days, and that it should be the new norm for workplaces - this is said to be more than employees with with children, or those with aged persons at home.

### **Findings from women and men - FWA, WFH, or WFO?**

Findings also differ between male and female employees. Approximately 73% of female employees felt that WFH on most days or FWA should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore - higher than around 66% of male employees. This sentiment - and finding - is consistent with female employees with dependents (94%), in contrast to male employees with dependents (86%). "[This] possibly reflects how females continue to be burdened with the lion share of domestic care work," report analysts explained.

On that note, it was cited in the report that workers have better psychological wellbeing when their current workplace arrangements matched their preferred work arrangements. For instance, employees with younger children reportedly had lower levels of wellbeing if they had to return to the office on most days.

"Hence, given how employees have adapted to working in the new normal and the ongoing conversation about work-life harmony, consideration should be given to employees' needs when deciding on working arrangements," the analysts added.

### **Is there something employers can do?**

The short answer is - yes. In fact, more than four in 10 (45%) employees felt that employers should allow them to choose which days they would prefer to return to office. And beyond that, communicate with them on the precautions and safety measures the company is taking to safeguard their health (44%), and provide flexible policies allowing for work-cations (41%), in order "to ease the transition back to working in office/hybrid work mode".

The reasons are, according to the employees surveyed, easy access to office network/IT systems (79%); ease of collaborating with colleagues on projects (78%), and conducive/dedicated working space (76%). Other reasons cited - which were coming from more than eight in 10 employees - included reduced chances of getting COVID-19 (87%); greater flexibility in incorporating personal life needs with work schedules (83%), and the ability to attend to family needs (81%).

Such work arrangements are much appreciated across the employees surveyed. Approximately eight in 10 employees who get to WFH most or all of the time "enjoyed" doing so, and about the same proportion felt that they were "productive". This proportion of positive sentiments towards WFH, according to report analysts, has increased over the last two pandemic waves in Singapore. Emotions aside, when work arrangements are congruent to employees' preferences, it generally brings about greater psychological wellbeing in employees, cited in the report.

Be that as it may, there were employees who are currently WFH - around 44% - sharing that their biggest challenge from WFH is "not being able to unplug from work" after working hours. Other challenges highlighted also included lack of social interaction with colleagues (37%), and lack of mutual trust between employer and employee (35%).

Food for thought, however, when employees surveyed were asked on their preference to work remotely in companies based overseas, about 53% said that they would prefer this arrangement if given the opportunity to do so.

### **Is there something employers should take note of?**

In essence, employees who are required to return to the office when their preference was for greater flexibility are more likely to indicate an inclination towards finding new employment.

Data revealed that among employees who were currently WFH, and felt that WFH on most days or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces, approximately 42% of them indicated that they would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. The same could also be said of employees with refreshed work aspirations due to the pandemic, as around 48% of them highlighted that

they would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days.

Even for employees with same work aspirations due to the pandemic, about 28% mentioned that they would consider looking for another job.

The report also discovered that thereabout 45% of employees who believed that the job market will be better in the next six months would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. Interestingly, those who believed that the job market will be bad or the same in the next six months would still consider looking for another job - this response constitutes to around 32%.

### **Is there something employers can learn from?**

According to report analysts, these findings are "unsurprising".

It was therefore suggested that workplaces should no longer be viewed as "sites for workers to produce the necessary output required of them" given that many workers can do this successfully at home. Rather workplaces should "provide the space for greater collaboration, fostering of organisational identity and belonging, as well as a sense of shared purpose".