

Flexi-Work Arrangements Should be Retained by Employers Even After COVID-19: Gan Siow Huang

Majority of employers are keen to continue flexi-work, according to MOM surveys.

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Flexi-Work Should Be Permanent Feature Of The Workplace, Says Gan Siow Huang

Since Singapore lifted most Covid-19 restrictions in Apr, all workers have been allowed to return to their workplaces.

However, after two years of working from home on and off, not all workers are eager to be in the office five days a week.

These sentiments have reached Parliament, where employers were urged to retain flexible work arrangements even after Covid-19.

In fact, they should be a permanent feature of the workplace.

Issue brought up in Parliament

The issue was brought up in Parliament by Jalan Besar MP Wan Rizal Wan Zakariah, who asked whether the Government would “go beyond encouraging” employers to support flexi-work arrangements.

In response, Minister of State for Manpower Gan Siow Huang effectively said: Yes.

In her oral answer, she said flexi-work was “relevant and important to businesses”.

Majority of employers keen to continue flexi-work: MOM

In fact, Ministry of Manpower (MOM) surveys show that the majority of employers are “keen to continue” flexi-work even after the pandemic is over, Ms Gan said.

This is due to the tangible benefits to both employers and employees.

For many employers, they’ve recognised that this arrangement strengthens business resilience. She added that such arrangements also boost companies’ ability to retain and attract talent, she added.

As for employees, the minister cited a recent study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), which said most Singapore workers prefer flexi-work.

It also found that about eight in 10 respondents felt they were productive despite spending most of their time telecommuting.

Employers urged to make flexi-work permanent

Thus, the Tripartite Partners – MOM, Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) – agree over the benefits of flexi-work.

They urge employers to “sustain and promote” flexi-work as a *permanent* feature of the workplace.

Ms Gan pointed out that the Tripartite Partners had released a statement in Apr encouraging this.

Besides WFH, they suggested other flexi-work options like staggered working hours, part-time work, a compressed work week and job-sharing.

Employers need time & support: Gan

However, Ms Gan acknowledged that employers would need time and support to implement flexi-work.

They will need to find the “right calibration” that satisfies employees and meets their business needs at the same time, she added.

This is because different industries will have different workplace settings and business needs.

Also, every employee is different and will thus expect and need different things from the arrangement.

Tripartite Partners will help

So to answer Dr Wan Rizal’s question, besides just providing encouragement, the Tripartite Partners will also help out.

They will do more to train and equip companies to implement flexi-work, for example in the areas of human resource policy or job redesign, adding,

“We will also partner our work-life ambassadors on the ground to support the implementation of flexible work arrangements.”

The minister noted that the public service has already taken the lead, adopting a Tripartite Standard on flexi-work arrangements.

New guidelines by 2024

Workers may also look forward to having their flexi-work requests taken more seriously.

Ms Gan previewed the new guidelines that the Tripartite Partners will release by 2024.

Among them will be a requirement for employers to “fairly and properly consider” requests for flexi-work.

Through this, it’s expected that it’ll become acceptable to ask for flexi-work.

But employers will still have the right to decide whether to grant such requests based on company needs.

All it takes is a little push

If there's anything positive about Covid-19, it's that it made Singapore workers realise how great flexi-work can be, such that some would even forego bigger bonuses to WFH.

This means that even when the pandemic eases off, more employees will yearn for flexi-work as a way to have some work-life balance.

Kudos to the Tripartite Partners for moving things along as sometimes, all it takes is a little push from the authorities to convince employers.

Hopefully prompted by these efforts, a day will come when flexi-work isn't a dirty word to bosses.