

Desire for flexi-work not surprising and firms are willing to offer the option

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SINGAPORE - It is not surprising that [people want flexible working arrangements to continue](#), and companies are prepared to offer that option as the new normal.

Flexible arrangements are the preferred way of working as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and Singapore workers would like employers to listen, communicate and adjust new work arrangements to suit their preferences, according to a paper released by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on Monday (April 25).

Some will even consider looking for new jobs if employers require them to return to the office on most days, the report revealed.

This is not an unexpected state of affairs, said executive coach Hardeep Matharu.

"As we add in the effects of Covid-19, where we all learnt that we can effectively work in a hybrid way (mixing remote and in-office operations), workers feel more entitled to demand flexibility which, therefore, should match their preferences," he said.

"We won't find employees accepting a full return to the office unless the nature of their role requires it... I would expect it to be a norm that workers spend three days in the office a week at least, and very few will want to be in the office five days a week."

Certain demographic groups, such as women, also are more inclined towards flexible work arrangements, especially those with dependants, the IPS study showed.

Mothers have always wanted flexible work arrangements, said Ms Sher-li Torrey, founder of Mums@Work.

"The only difference is that employees realise now that it can be done. This means if an employer chooses not to allow it, the reasons stopping the implementation of such arrangements would be more of mindset stubbornness or a lack of strong managerial skills to manage employees on flexible work arrangements."

The public service will take the lead with flexible working arrangements, a tripartite statement had said.

"Eligible public officers in job roles which are conducive to hybrid work will be allowed to telecommute for an average of two days a week," it said.

It added that the public service will also develop new supervisory skills in terms of managing teams effectively in a hybrid work environment.

Boutique law firm That.Legal said none of its staff is required to go to the office, except for monthly "roll calls". It still plans to have staff gather once a month for discussions and team bonding.

Some 90 per cent of its staff prefer to get their work done from home, said executive director Mark Teng.

"In fact, some argue they have gained the ability to better balance their work and their personal lives - some use the extra time to exercise, spend time with their loved ones, and to pursue personal interests."

He added that data also suggests that working from home saves two to three hours a day from commuting.

Mr Chan Chee Kong, chief operating officer of GlobalTix, said the firm is taking a wait-and-see approach for now. Currently, employees have the flexibility to return two to three times a week.

Coinhako co-founder Gerry Eng said his firm intends to retain a hybrid structure, to allow staff freedom and control over their time.

A spokesman for the Action Community for Entrepreneurship, the national trade association for start-ups, said allowing staff to work from home or anywhere has strengthened the resilience of local start-ups.

"It will continue to play an important role in building work-life harmony and enhancing productivity. Meanwhile, employees must also understand business needs and the employer's perspective on building a cohesive workforce and be adaptable, to create win-win situations."

Ms Nur Fatehah Salim, 28, made use of the flexible work arrangement during the pandemic to co-found SG Healthcare Heroes to support healthcare workers.

Her company, media intelligence firm Meltwater, will extend flexi-work policies to its entire workforce in Singapore.

Before the pandemic, flexi-work was available only on a case-by-case basis, mostly for senior employees who travelled widely for work, and for parents returning to work.

Some employees will now need to come into the office only two to three days each week, while others can work fully remotely.

Said the senior media analyst: "With the flexible work environment during Covid-19, I was able to manage my time at work much better and use the extra hours towards founding and running SG Healthcare Heroes."

- Additional reporting by Krist Boo, Jessie Lim and Tay Hong Yi