

Workers gained new skills, shifted work aspirations amid Covid-19: IPS report

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The Straits Times, 25 April 2022

SINGAPORE - The Covid-19 pandemic may have put the brakes on many social activities, but Singapore's workers continued to gain new skills throughout the period, as shown in a new report released on Monday (April 25).

Nearly half the respondents also said the pandemic had changed their work aspirations, with some of them even considering a career switch.

These were the results of a paper by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) that examined the attitudes towards work and workplace arrangements amid the coronavirus outbreak.

It showed that 51 per cent of the respondents felt that they had learnt new skills in the last two years that would help in their career.

This was especially the case among younger workers aged 30 to 39, and those who had higher educational qualifications, such as a degree and above.

Respondents with higher salaries, such as those earning more than \$5,999, were also more likely than those with lower salaries to feel that they had learnt new skills that would help them in their career, it added.

Besides skills, the pandemic also caused people to re-evaluate their work aspirations.

Some 47 per cent of those polled felt that the pandemic changed their work goals, with 69 per cent of these people saying that they have considered a career switch.

"Younger respondents, who may be more open to finding alternate paths of success and have a different definition of success as compared to older generations, had re-evaluated their long-term career goals in order to have time and energy to pursue other life goals," the report said.

IPS social lab associate director Mike Hou said: "The younger and more highly educated group... probably have more options. The pandemic has forced everyone to relook their priorities, so for this group of people, they may stop chasing status or money and may choose to do something they think is more meaningful."

The report added that those with children 12 and under were also more likely to have changed work aspirations.

"The pandemic might have highlighted the need to prioritise family relationships," it said.

"Working parents with younger children would hence gravitate towards wanting work arrangements which allow greater flexibility to manage their work and family commitments."

But besides those who want - and can - change careers, the pandemic has also created a second group who re-evaluate their work aspirations because of the disruptions they have suffered.

Dr Hou said: "They are those who have job losses, are forced to consider a different industry because of economic demands, or (experienced) changes in their salary or remuneration.

"So these are the people who may be forced to rethink or re-evaluate their priorities... because of these forces beyond their control."

The survey tracked more than 2,000 respondents drawn from an online panel from technology company Toluna.

About 500 respondents were polled every two weeks over 19 fortnights to track shifts in attitudes. The 19 waves were from July 14, 2021, to April 11, 2022.

Moving farther afield is also a possibility. The report showed that 53 per cent of those polled would prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas, if given the opportunity.

Overall, people felt the job market outlook was more hopeful now than in July last year.

Last July, around 45 per cent of respondents felt that the job market outlook for the next six months was bad.

This proportion decreased in August, but then rose again in September.

A much higher proportion of respondents felt negative about the job market outlook during these periods last year, possibly due to the higher number of community Covid-19 cases and stricter safe management measures, which would have impeded economic recovery, the report noted.

Since then, the number of those who felt the job market outlook was bad steadily declined till February this year.

"Perhaps the fact that the Government has been consistent in not implementing stricter measures even as the Omicron wave struck our shores (unlike in some other countries) added to confidence in the labour market," the report said.

"Moreover, the lower perceived fallout from the Omicron infection due to its being relatively milder than earlier strains and very high vaccination levels locally may have bolstered this confidence."

But there was an unexpected dip in confidence in the job market in March, which may have stemmed from the war in Ukraine and concerns of it affecting the global economy and jobs, said the report.

"However, perhaps with greater confidence that the war was localised and in light of further easing of community safe management measures announced on March 24, there was an increase in positive outlook towards the job market in April."