

# The great renegotiation: Workforce expectations on the rise in S'pore

## Workers want flexibility, training and are willing to quit if demands aren't met: Surveys

**Krist Boo**  
Senior Correspondent  
and Tay Hong Yi

Workers in Singapore are raising their expectations of having more flexibility, training and pay in their jobs, with many willing to quit or simply not take up jobs that lack these factors, according to surveys out this year.

This is in line with the global trend of employers ceding control to their staff in a bid to retain talent in the post-pandemic era, coined "The Great Renegotiation".

Conducted by firms ranging from talent recruiters Michael Page and Randstad to human resource consultants Mercer and KellyOCG to tech companies Cisco and UiPath, the reports all reflect a consistent finding: A majority of local workers intend to quit in the coming months if their demands are not met.

Their bosses, too, are mulling over leaving: 81 per cent of 67 senior executives say they plan to resign within these two years, citing poor work-life balance as one reason in KellyOCG's findings.

That statistic is higher than 69 per cent in Asia and 72 per cent globally.

KellyOCG managing director Peter Hamilton expects the trend to persist given the talent crunch, noting: "Our survey shows that globally, 37 per cent of employee expectations have changed since the pandemic.

"They have higher expectations around work-life balance, flexible working, benefits, well-being support. This figure is higher in Singapore at 43 per cent."

Compared with the rest of the world, local employers are less prepared to deal with the new aspirations foisted on them.

About 12 per cent of them, compared with 15 per cent globally, fared well in an aggregate score that grades firms on employee experience, agility such as in the use of contingent workers, factors including diversity, and adoption of technology.

In Mercer's study, 62 per cent of staff say not being able to work remotely or hybrid permanently is a deal breaker when considering whether to join or stay with an organisation.

About 86 per cent of C-suite executives, on the other hand, fret over the impact of permanent hybrid and remote working on office bonding, while 60 per cent believe "fundamentally, work gets done in an office, not remotely", the report adds.

Auditor Urvish Sawalani, 25, sees no reason for bosses to call workers back. "We can wake up and start later, but as long as we get the job done, that's what matters."

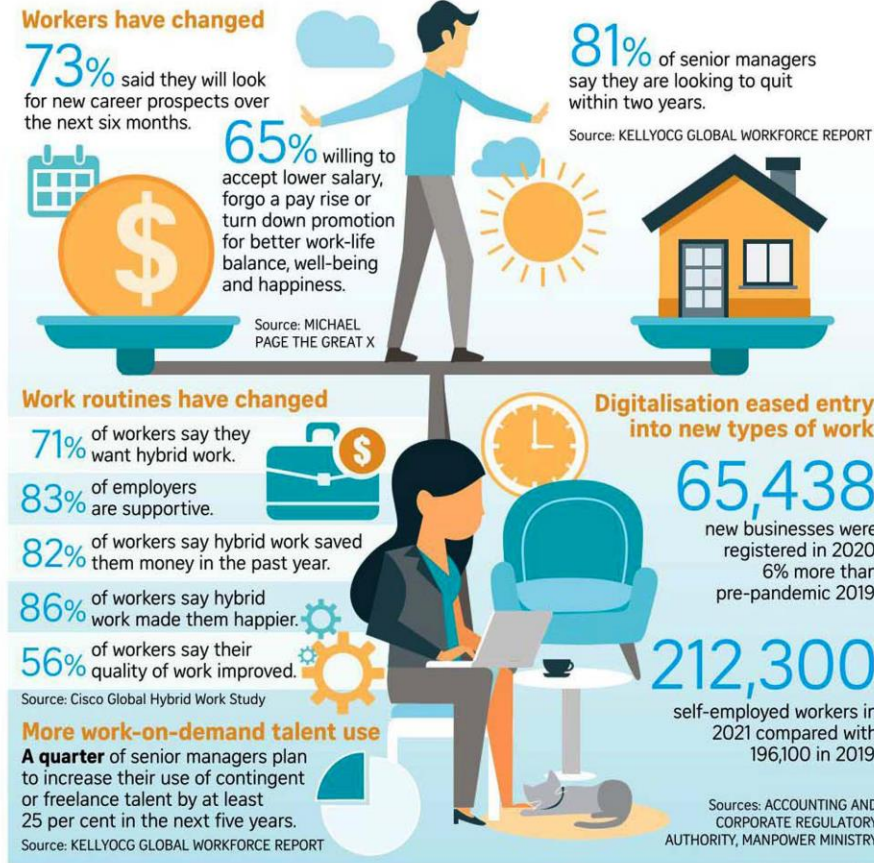
He added: "I think the perks that emerged to support employees during Covid-19 will become the new norm."

Staff engagement and choice are recurring advice to employers in the reports.

Mr Ravin Jesuthasan, Mercer's global leader of transformation services, said: "The companies that will win are the ones who make it as easy as possible for people to engage with their company and do their work."

"It's not going to be the companies that say, 'I give you flexibility, but you have to be in the office four days a week and those four days

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are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday'. It is not flexibility if it is not a choice."

Choice, however, is not on em-

ployers' side, said Associate Professor Tan Hwee Hoon of the Singapore Management University. Until the labour market eases, "em-

ployers are unlikely to dictate where employees work", she added.

"Some folks are talking about a

10-month work year, pointing to the need to provide more flexibility rather than less. What is happening in the labour market now is a movement towards employee preferences."

Despite that, plus supply chain bottlenecks and inflation, employers are "cautiously optimistic" in their outlook, said the Singapore National Employers Federation.

The employers' trade union is urging bosses to offer versatile work locations, hours and contracts to tap underused labour sources and adopt automation and technology such as robots.

"Technology, if you do it well, you can literally reduce your headcount costs to a fraction of what it is today," said its executive director, Mr Sim Gim Guan.

Ultimately, workers and employers are on the same team, said Mr Jesuthasan. But unless a global recession sets off a "reset", leverage will continue to tilt "towards the employee side, or maybe stay the same", he added.

The 280,000 local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that hire about 70 per cent of the workforce here are getting the brunt of the talent churn, said recruiters.

Mr Kurt Wee, president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, said: "There is a disconnect between what companies need and how the workforce wants to work."

"Employers are facing substantial cost increases on all fronts and there is a bit of job hopping going on."

Mr Sim said: "Everyone is still readjusting, but by May next year, I believe we should be able to find an equilibrium."

kristb@sph.com.sg

hytay@sph.com.sg

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