

Young Hongkongers rank work–life balance over career prospects as top priority for ideal job, study says



Young Hongkongers have put work–life balance as the top factor when looking for their ideal job, with career prospects a lower priority, researchers have found.

Researchers at the think tank MWYO on Thursday revealed the findings of a survey on the attitudes of Hongkongers aged between 18 and 34 towards working life.

The study found that the 506 respondents listed work–life balance, which scored 8.26 out of 10, as the most important factor when finding the ideal job.

The top choice was followed by high income and the alignment of the role with their personal values.

“We can see that factors contributing to happiness and financial stability are equally important, while factors related to career prospects were of lower priority,” researcher Peper Yau Pui–chung said.

Whether their work contributed to society, which scored 6.33 points out of 10, was ranked the lowest among the 10 factors included in the survey.

Yau said that more than 85 per cent of respondents, surveyed by phone between July and October last year, were employed full-time, which showed that permanent jobs were still the mainstream model.

The survey found that almost half of the 75 respondents who said they were employed part-time or as freelancers said they did so to earn more income.

The group was mostly employed in the creative or healthcare industries and were from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

A third of those who chose part-time or freelance roles said they did so because it gave them more flexibility in their schedules.

Only 2.7 per cent said they took that route for a better work-life balance.

“The benefit of freelancing is flexible working hours, which can help them work multiple part-time jobs or go for skills upgrading, which will help them find a better full-time job in the future,” Yau said.

Young adults without full-time employment reported lower satisfaction across several job indicators, particularly in relation to stability, training opportunities, benefits and promotion prospects.

But they reported higher satisfaction with their work-life balance compared with contemporaries in full-time work.

More than two-thirds of those who worked part-time or freelanced earned less than HK\$20,000 (US\$2,560) a month, compared with a third of those fully employed who earned between HK\$20,000 and HK\$30,000 monthly.

The report added that part-time employment could be a phase for young adults as they worked towards full-time opportunities that paid better than less meaningful casual work.

Researchers recommended that the government establish a talent database for freelancers, especially those in the creative industries, to help support them.

The think tank also suggested that authorities subsidise companies to hire more freelancing adults aged 34 or under and provide a salary subsidy of up to HK\$10,000 a month for freelancers who worked about 20 hours a week.

Alison Chang Wai-man, a veteran employment headhunter, said many of her clients had highlighted they could not hire young, talented staff, despite attractive offers.

Chang said the survey results showed that young adults no longer only looked at how well jobs paid when they planned their careers.

“I always tell my clients, don’t assume you can hire talent with money,” Chang added.

“That doesn’t work these days. Employees need to see the value in your company.”

She said talent retention required a change in work environments and in the behaviour of supervisors who micromanaged and were inflexible and distrusted their staff.

“People always say there is a lack of talent in Hong Kong,” she said. “There is plenty of talent, but it is a matter of whether you know how to use them well.”